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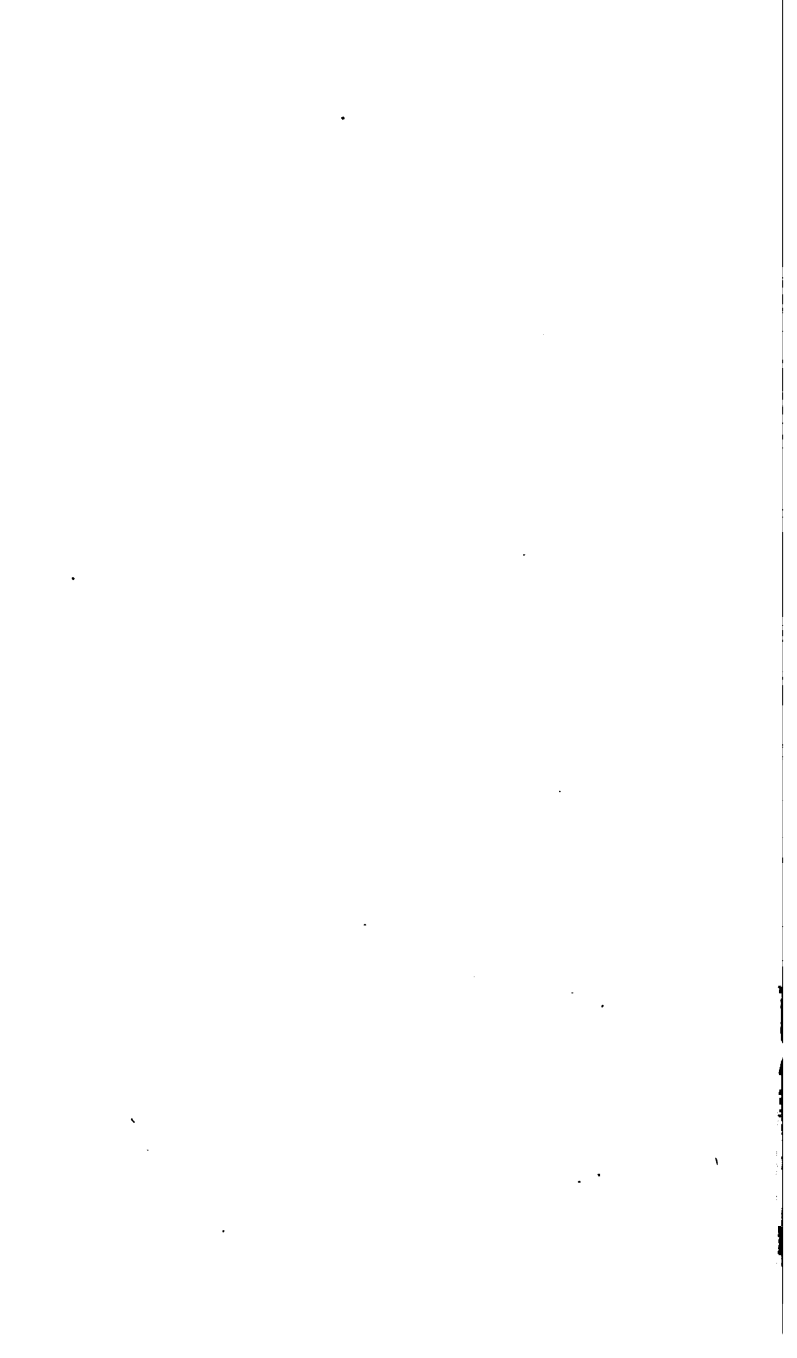
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HIDDEN DEPTHS.



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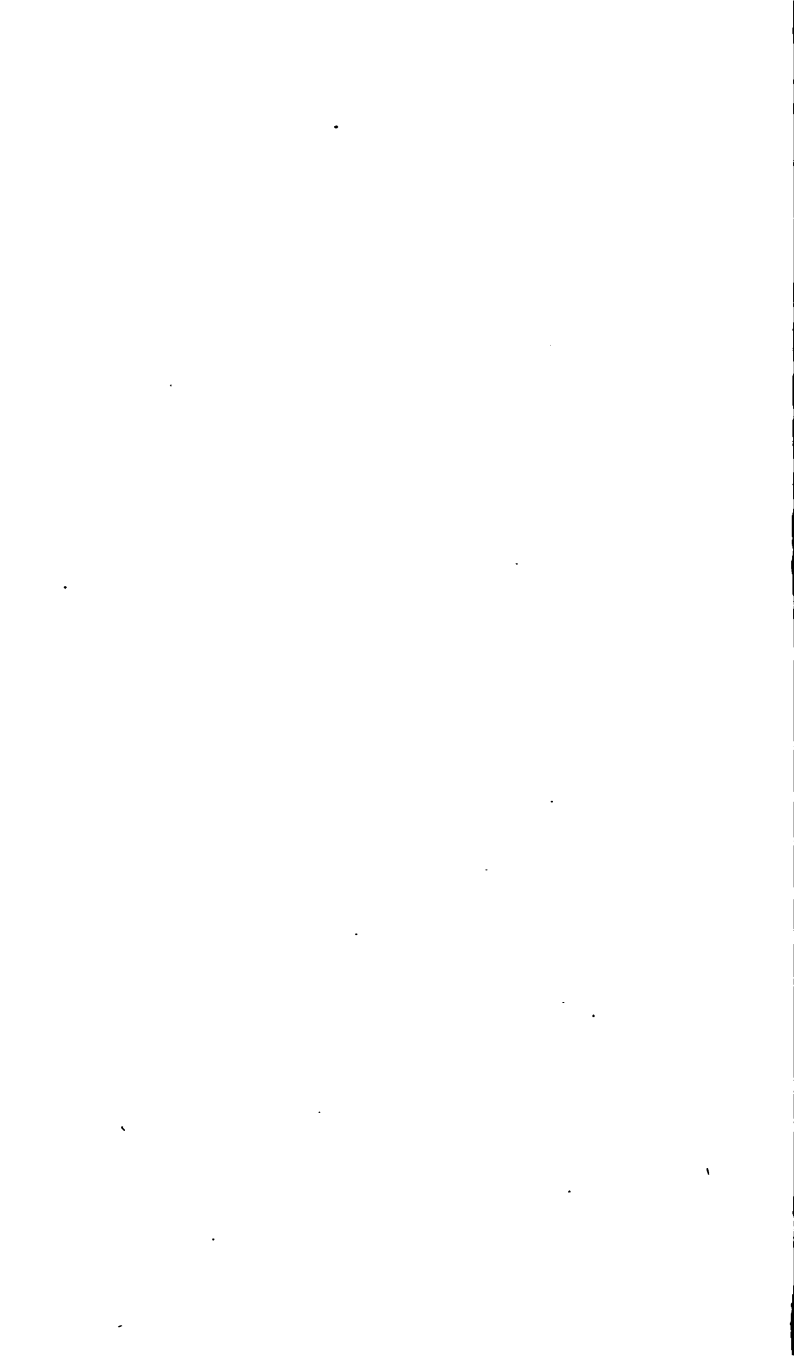
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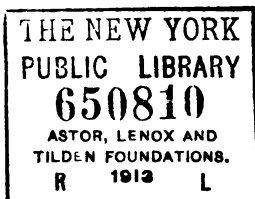
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PREFACE.

This book is not a work of fiction, in the ordinary acceptation of the term. If it were, it would be worse than useless; for the hidden depths, of which it reveals a glimpse, are no fit subjects for a romance, nor ought they to be opened up to the light of day for purposes of mere amusement. But truth must always have a certain power, in whatever shape it may appear; and though all did not occur precisely as here narrated, it is nevertheless actual truth which speaks in these records.

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HIDDEN DEPTHS.

CHAPTER I.

THE DEPOT.

THERE must be a something remarkable, generally speaking, in the appearance of an individual who attracts attention in the crowded thoroughfares of a large city. Yet it is a noticeable fact, that if among the numbers hurrying to and fro, there is one person whose mind is fixed with a determined concentration of the will on any given object, that energy of purpose, silent and secret as it is, will make itself felt on the passers-by with a power of which they are themselves unconscious. Such was the case one bright spring day in a wide street in Seamount, where a young woman, walking rapidly along, was observed with a vague curiosity by all who approached her. There was nothing in her dress or appearance to justify the attention she excited. She was handsome, certainly, but her beauty was evidently dependent on that evanescent brilliancy of youth and health which our neighbors term "*la beauté du diable*;" and there were already indications on her strongly-marked features of the coarseness which usually takes the place of these transitory charms among women of the lower orders. Her dress was chiefly

remarkable for its costly material, which ill befitted the station in life to which she clearly belonged, but its elaborate display of colors was arranged with a certain picturesque adjustment, which heightened the effect of her dark eyes and bright complexion. It was, however, the expression of her face which caused every one to gaze at her as they passed along; for it must have been some desperate purpose which had drawn her forehead into such a frown of stern resolution, and lit up that lurid fire in her eyes, while the set teeth and quivering nostril told unmistakably of a fierce internal struggle. So strong was the impression of passionate energy which seemed to flash from her convulsed, yet rigid countenance, that several persons stopped to watch her as she hastened on, clearing the way before her, as if determined not to allow anything to turn her from her course either to the right hand or to the left.

To her it evidently mattered nothing whether she were observed or not, and she only noticed the numbers passing round her by grasping more tightly some papers which she held in her clinched hand. A child came across her path, but she would not stay her impetuous course one moment to let it pass, and appeared not even to hear its sharp cry as it fell on the pavement; then a carriage came at full speed down the street she was crossing, but she paid no attention whatever to the shouts of the coachman, who called to her to stand back till he passed, and he could only save her from being trampled under the horses' feet by throwing them on their haunches just as the pole touched her shoulder; other obstructions met her in the crowded way, but still she never so much as turned her head, and held on her course, breathless and determined, till

she reached the gate of the court-yard in which the Emigrant Depot is placed.

This building is used for various purposes, and among other, for the shelter of soldiers' wives who are sent to their husbands in India at the expense of the Government, and who generally remain at the depot for a few days previous to their embarkation. It was occupied, at the time of which we speak, by the women belonging to two regiments stationed at Lucknow, and they were to sail the following day in the "Hero," which was also to take out Colonel Courtenay of the —th Regiment, returning from leave, and a few other officers and men.

The principal door stood open, and the young woman walked straight in, and advanced into the first room on the ground floor which presented itself before her. It proved to be the kitchen, where a little man with a merry, comical face was presiding over various caldrons, and brandishing a huge ladle in his hand. She went up to him, and laid her hand on his shoulder so suddenly that he started violently.

"I want to go to India!" she said, in a voice harsh from suppressed agitation.

"Well! and if you do, you need not make a fellow jump sky-high for that," said the aggrieved cook.

"Here are my papers," she continued, in the same hoarse tone.

"I don't want them, bless you! There, you go up these stairs"—he pointed to the right—"and you will find some one to take them."

Instantly she turned and was gone, almost before he had finished his sentence. He looked after her for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders, and turned round

with an air of paternal tenderness to a huge piece of beef, which had been occupying his attention when she interrupted him.

Meantime, up the creaking wooden stair went that determined step, and on into a small room on the first landing, of which the door stood wide open. Here a non-commissioned officer was seated behind a small table covered with papers; a large book lay open before him, and he was engaged in entering into it the name of a soldier's wife, who had just arrived with her two children to embark next day. A private was in attendance at the door, and as he saw the young woman draw near, he signed to her to wait till the other was disposed of. She did so, standing rigid as a statue. On her right hand was an immense room, the temporary abode of some hundreds of women and children, whose voices were coming from it in shrill confusion; but she did not seem even to be conscious of their vicinity, and remained with her eyes fixed on vacancy till her turn came for inspection. At length the certificates of the soldier's wife were pronounced "All right," and she was passed on to join the others. Then the girl went forward, and laid her papers silently on the table before the sergeant. He took up the printed form authorizing embarkation, which he knew so well, and glanced at the place where the names of the women and their absent husbands were inserted. Those marked on the girl's paper were "Mary Anne Reed," wife of "James Reed," private of the —th Regiment, stationed at Lucknow. The sergeant read them two or three times, then looked up keenly at the young woman.

"Are you sure this is your certificate?" he asked.

"Quite sure," she answered doggedly.

"In that case," he said coolly, "Jim Reed has two wives, which is one too many for a living man, let alone a dead one, as he is at this present time."

A visible tremor shook the girl from head to foot, yet she stood firm.

"These are my papers, and they are right," she said, articulating with difficulty.

The sergeant turned to the private: "Smith, did I not send you to the station yesterday to meet James Reed's wife, and tell her that the last mail brought the news of his death?"

"You did, sir."

"Is this the woman?"

"No more like her than I am, sir! She was a thin little woman, with a pale face, and this here"—he paused and looked at the girl; "why, this here is a stunner!"

"She passed herself off for his wife, but she was not so really," said the young woman.

"Not his wife!" exclaimed Smith, with a burst of indignation; "I should like to see any one venture to say that who saw her face yesterday when I told her he was gone. She looked at me as if she thought the world was come to an end. Then all of a sudden she gave such a shriek—I can hear it now. 'My Jim! my Jim!' she cried out, and after a minute she said, quite low, 'O Lord, I wish I were dead!' and down she dropped on the ground as if she were shot. I shan't forget it in a hurry. She had friends with her who knew right well she was his wife; and they took her back, poor creature, the way she came."

The girl's hands worked convulsively, but still she did not move.

"Come, come, my girl, this is no use," said the sergeant; "if you could prove you were his wife it would do no good; the man's dead and gone—you can't go out to him."

"There are two James Reeds," she said in her hoarse voice.

"Now, look here," he answered angrily, "there is not the least use in your attempting to gammon me, my girl. Do you suppose I don't know the name of every man in the regiment rather better than you do? There is but one James Reed, and he died of cholera two months ago. You were not his wife, and what is more, I don't believe you ever called any honest man husband."

"And I can tell you how she came by these papers," exclaimed a woman, rushing triumphantly into the room with all that satisfaction beaming on her face which it affords some of us in this world to hunt down our fellow-creatures. She had been on her way to the kitchen from the other room when the altercation commenced, and, true to her sex, she had remained listening to it with eager curiosity. "I was at the station when Mrs. Reed was told of her poor man's death—you remember me helping you, no doubt, Mr. Smith?" she continued, appealing to the private, who nodded, with a look which seemed to imply that the recollection was not particularly agreeable, and she went on giving her evidence after the manner of women. "I helped to carry her out into the air, poor woman. I could feel for her, sir, for I am a wife and a mother myself, and a widow too—leastways I buried my first, eight years come Michaelmas; and a great brute he was to me, and seven children I've had—"

"Well, well, what do you know about the papers, Mrs. Miller?" said the sergeant, cutting her short.

"I knows this, sir. Mrs. Reed had them in her hand when she fell in a faint in the waiting-room, and when she came to herself on the platform she had not got them, and says she to me, says she, 'Would you please to look for my papers, ma'am; perhaps they will be wanted?' and I went, sir, for she could no more have walked than a new-born babe; and I know what the 'sterics are myself: I am very subject to them, sir, and a drop of peppermint—"

"But the papers, Mrs. Miller?"

"Well, sir, you do flurry me so, sir. Well, I went back and looked for them everywhere. I looked in the gentlemen's hats as was standing on the table, and in the coal-scuttle, and everywhere I could think of, and nothing could I see of them; but this here young woman was stooping down at one of the seats when I came in, and I saw her stuff something into her pocket, and off she went out of the station, and I thought no harm—bless you, I thinks no evil of no one; never—but she had them safe enough, I'll warrant—a hussy!"

"What answer have you to make to that charge, young woman?" said the sergeant, looking sternly at her. Her lips moved, but she did not speak, and she remained gazing in his face with such a look of wild misery in her eyes, that he was touched in spite of himself. He turned to her accuser:

"Well, Mrs. Miller, I have no doubt you are right, and I am much obliged to you; and now, will you please to go down? I see some other persons waiting to give in their papers."

She opened her mouth, but the proposed remark was

lost to this record by the silent eloquence of Smith, who put his hand to her elbow and quietly turned her out of the room. She muttered a protest against this summary ejection, and then hastened down stairs to enlighten the cook on the extent of the young woman's iniquity, and her own sagacity.

The sergeant then turned to the unhappy girl, and said, not unkindly, "Now, my girl, you see this won't do. I have no doubt you have a sweetheart in India, and it is natural you should wish to go to him, but we can't let you cheat Her Majesty's Government. You must find some other way to go out—"

"Or get another sweetheart," said Smith, in an oracular tone, and, at a sign from the sergeant, he drew her from the room with much more gentleness than he had shown to the acute Mrs. Miller. He then turned from her and proceeded to usher in some other women who had arrived in the mean time, leaving her standing close to the door of the large room where the women and children were assembled.

The girl looked in upon the noisy crowd with a wistful, longing gaze, and saw that, from their numbers and the size of the room, an interloper might easily remain undetected, and with a sudden determination she walked in quietly and took her way to the farther corner of the apartment. The sole furniture it contained was a long row of tables placed near the wall, with a bench on either side, and, at meal times, when a certain amount of regularity prevailed, it might have been seen that each of these tables was allotted to a fixed number of women, who were not allowed to interfere with their neighbors. She went on to the most remote corner, where two women were engaged in clear-

ing away the remains of their dinner, while several others were sitting round, with their children scrambling at their feet and fighting for the fragments that had fallen down. Stealing in among them, the girl took her seat in the darkest place without uttering a word; but of course she had not been there a moment before the sharp eyes of the women spied her out. One of those who was cleaning the table, a tall, bold-faced woman, who might, from her appearance, have been to India half a dozen times with as many husbands, laid down the plate she held in her hand, placed herself in an attitude of interrogation of a very marked character, and said, "Are you come to visit any one?"

"No," said the girl; "I am going to India."

"And do you mean to say that you have been ordered to mess with us?"

"Yes," she answered in a low tone, hardly understanding the meaning of the question. Thereupon the soldier's wife struck the table vigorously with her fist, and exclaimed, "I declare it is too bad! Here we are at No. 60, twelve of us already, besides the children, and they send us a new-comer, while down there, at No. 52, there are only ten of them. But I won't be put upon, whatever the rest of you may do; I'll go to the sergeant and complain—I will. Why, we've only just victuals for ourselves as it is. I'll go at once."

The young woman seized her by the arm, with a suppressed shriek. "O no, no!" she cried; "pray don't say anything about me. I won't trouble you—indeed I won't. I don't want anything to eat, and, besides, I can buy it, I have money;" and she pulled out a well-filled purse and held it up before the woman.

"Well, to be sure! you have a sight of money there,"

said the other, evidently mollified by the discovery of such unusual riches; "there's not many of us has such a purse as that, and you have no children that I can see. You are a lucky one, that's certain."

"Still I don't see why she should not go to No. 52, where they have plenty of room," said another woman; "there are quite enough of us here, and I am sure our quarters at night are crammed full already; I don't know where she could find a hole to put her mattress in?"

"Oh, never mind," said the girl, "I don't want to sleep, I'll lie at the door; I won't disturb you, only let me stay here. Don't go to the sergeant."

"Let her be, Mrs. Hardy," said a quiet little woman from the other end of the table; "she is in sore trouble, poor thing, or I'm much mistaken. Don't let us worry her. She can sleep by me."

"Very well, you must please yourself, Mrs. Clement; and if you should be stifled by the heat at night, you have yourself to blame."

"And *I* think these are very smart clothes for a soldier's wife," added the other, looking significantly at the girl's gaudy silk dress. All the heads nodded in acquiescence at this remark, except that of the gentle Mrs. Clement, who quietly moved away a large box, in order to make room for the girl in the dark corner she had chosen, and then sat down silently to her work. Gradually the other women subsided also to their usual employments, which consisted in worrying their children to the last pitch of endurance, and then scolding them for the inevitable result. One little girl, however, who belonged to the redoubtable Mrs. Hardy herself, crept toward the stranger, and began to look up into

the dark eyes that were so deeply sorrowful, with an unconscious expression of sympathy stealing over her sweet childish face. After a moment, she drew nearer, and softly stroked the girl's cheek with her little hand. The young woman's attention being thus attracted, she turned to look at her; and as she met that gaze of innocent, half-wondering pity fixed upon her, a choking sob escaped her. She threw her arms round the child with a sort of passionate tenderness, and lifting her on her knee, she clasped her close in her embrace, and leant her weary head against her. The little girl nestled into her bosom, and remained motionless, till gradually her eyes closed, and she fell asleep on the aching heart that never again assuredly would know the blessed rest of peaceful innocence. After a time, Mrs. Hardy looked round for her child, but, termigant as she was, she had a woman's heart; and as she saw how that countenance, darkened by hidden anguish, seemed to grow more gently mournful as it dropped over the calm face of the slumbering little one, she made no attempt to remove the child from her arms, and even ceased to look with malevolent eyes on the gay dress that contrasted so forcibly with the homely attire worn by herself and the other women.

Some hours passed away undisturbed, except by the unceasing din which was created all day long by the assemblage of so many women and children in one place. At last it so chanced that the acute Mrs. Miller, who was placed at the other end of the room, had occasion to borrow a pair of scissors from Mrs. Clement, and she suddenly made her appearance in the group which surrounded the stranger. For a moment she did not perceive her, and the girl, trembling from

head to foot, buried her face among the fair curls of her little companion. But the attempt at concealment was quite in vain. Mrs. Miller bent forward to inspect Mrs. Clement's work, and her eye fell on the crouching figure in the corner. She uttered a loud exclamation, which attracted the attention of all who were near her, and then stood staring at the girl, while she gave vent to her indignant astonishment in a series of fragmentary remarks that were not very intelligible.

"Well I never! Well, to be sure, here is impudence! Who could have believed it? A brazen-faced hussy!" and so on, for some minutes.

"What is it, Mrs. Miller?" exclaimed all the women eagerly, while Mrs. Hardy especially requested to be informed if she had not shown great wisdom in pronouncing "this here young woman to be a bad un."

"A bad un ain't no word for it, Mrs. Hardy, I can assure you," said Mrs. Miller, looking as if she possessed a State secret. "Just call Mr. Smith, if *you* please," and forthwith she began to call him herself in tones resembling those of an agitated peacock. The cry, taken up by half the women in the room, who crowded round in the delightful anticipation of a scene, soon brought the warlike Smith to the field of action, where he was immediately collared by Mrs. Miller. She dragged him forward, and, with much unconscious stage effect, pointed out the delinquent.

The unhappy girl, forced to leave her seat by the women crowding to the spot, had risen, and now stood like some wild animal at bay, with her merciless pursuers closing round her. With one hand she still held the little child, and pressed her close to her side, while in the clinched fingers of the other she seemed to expend some of the strength with which she would

gladly have fought her way out of that crowd of enemies. Her face, meantime, seemed to grow dark with the despair that was settling on her heart, and her eyes, unnaturally dilated, gazed out upon the excited women with a look of savage agony, which was much more the expression of a hunted beast than of a human being. Smith did not look at her face, however, in his virtuous indignation at this breach of military discipline. Setting the women aside, he walked straight up to her, and seized her by the wrist in an iron grasp.

"Now, you deceitful young woman, you will please to walk out of this, or I'll know the reason why."

She only answered by wrenching her arm from his hold, with a violence which caused the mark of his fingers to remain in a livid streak upon her wrist; then, gathering her cloak round her, she crouched close to the wall, as if resolved that no human power should uproot her from the spot.

Smith's face flushed with anger, and he was advancing somewhat fiercely toward her, when he suddenly met the gaze of her despairing eyes fixed upon him with such a look of hopeless desolation that it went straight to his honest heart. He paused, rubbed his forehead, glanced uneasily at Mrs. Miller, as if he felt he was about to sink in her estimation forever, and then, his better feelings mastering him, he laid his hand kindly on the girl's shoulder, and said, "I'll tell you what it is, my poor girl, I am sorry for you, I am, for I can see that you are hard put to it, somehow or other; but I wish you would believe me when I tell you it is no manner of use going on like this; you are playing a losing game, you may depend upon it. Why, your papers would have to be seen half a dozen times

before you could sail. Your luggage must be overhauled, the doctor must see to your health, and the matron to your outfit. You would be found out over and over again before ever you got on board."

"And serve her right, too! a-setting *herself* up for a soldier's wife," exclaimed Mrs. Miller. "I wonder at your meekness, Mr. Smith, I do!"

"You take my advice," said Smith, nothing moved by this cutting remark; "just take yourself quietly off, and don't oblige me to report you to the sergeant; for if I do, it's ten chances to one but you go to jail for coming here on false pretenses; and you don't look to me like one of a sort to stand locking-up."

"Locking-up! O no!" she gave almost a scream; "anything but that just now. I will go—I will go;" and hurrying nervously from her place, she began to move through the crowd. The little girl still clung to her, upon which Mrs. Hardy seized hold of her and administered a violent shaking, according to the approved mode of punishment adopted by mothers of her description. The child cried out, and at the sound the young woman suddenly turned, stooped down and kissed her, in spite of Mrs. Hardy's resistance; then, thrusting aside all who impeded her progress, she made her way from the room, and finally disappeared.

"There! that's a precious riddance, if ever there was one," said Mrs. Miller triumphantly.

"Well, Mrs. Clement, I hope you are satisfied now?" said Mrs. Hardy. "So sure as I am alive, that wench is no better than she should be!"

"Then she is the more to be pitied," said Mrs. Clement, with a gentle sigh. And would to Heaven that all who may read these words would not only agree with her opinion, but act as though they did.

CHAPTER II.

COLONEL COURTENAY.

AT noon next day the "Hero" was to sail with its human freight, and from the first dawn of morning all was bustle and confusion on deck, while a constant succession of boats plied between the ship and the shore, bringing the soldiers' wives and children from the depot. Their friends and acquaintances were allowed to see them on board, which added in no small degree to the bewildering noise and confusion; and it certainly seemed as if nothing could reduce the motley crowd to anything like order or quiet.

The principal passenger, however, Colonel Courtenay, took the matter very composedly, and had evidently no intention of risking his comfort by appearing on the scene till everything was ready for immediate departure. At ten o'clock he was still seated at breakfast in one of the most luxurious rooms of the hotel, with apparently no greater anxiety on his mind than the final accomplishment of that repast to his own satisfaction. It would not have been easy to have found a more comfortable picture of *bien-être* than he exhibited as he sat in the light of the morning sun, laughing and talking gayly with the beautiful woman whom, within the last fortnight, he had made his wife, and caressing with easy good nature a rough little terrier frolicking round him.

George Courtenay was a man universally envied, and almost as universally liked ; and certainly, in the whole outward aspect of his life and being, appeared to be possessed of all that on this earth is held most good and valuable. He had good birth and a good fortune, unshackled by the duties of a landowner, which to a man of his temperament would have been exceedingly irksome. His father, the younger son of a wealthy peer, had left him an excellent income, which gave him no cause to regret that the family estates had passed to his uncle, Lord Beaufort. In person he was strikingly handsome—too much so, an artist would have said ; for it was a beauty entirely dependent on the regularity of his features, the rich brown of his hair and beard, and the massive proportions of his tall muscular figure. There was no ray from the divine fire of intellect, or spirituality, to glorify the fine face and relieve its earthliness. A painter would have found it easy to make a correct likeness, but he would have had no scope for the exercise of his genius in the play of thought or expression. In character he was indisputably brave, of which he had given abundant proof in the Indian Mutiny ; full of energy and decision—the sort of energy which carried him at the head of a handful of men among a swarm of revolted native soldiers ; and the kind of decision which, when the victory was gained, made him only wait to smoke a cigar before he had half a dozen of the rebels shot. He was further characterized by two qualities of so very opposite a description that they might seem to form an impossible combination, though in truth a very common one, and these were deliberate cruelty and careless good nature ; both, in fact, being the development of that which was

his ruling passion—an intense self-love. Thus, for instance, in India his black servants found that he never intimated his wishes to them by means of blows, as our freeborn Englishmen are in the habit of doing in that land of their tender adoption, but at the same time they found that he made them work for the gratification of the very smallest of his pleasures till they fainted from exhaustion. He would spend hours feeding and caressing his favorite dogs, but if it suited him to ride a certain distance on a certain horse, he would ride that horse to death without the smallest compunction. Of course, in general society, while his good nature and lavish generosity were extremely prominent, his cold-blooded selfishness and cruelty were quite in the background, and thus, by the world in general, Colonel Courtenay was considered perfectly charming. It is not to be denied that he was a most agreeable companion, a thorough gentleman in manner, with a full share of the light graceful wit which is so attractive in society; and, as he possessed the additional advantage of a brilliant talent for music, he was welcomed and flattered wherever he went. As to his private life, the refined ladies and gentlemen with whom he associated never gave themselves any concern about it. Not that they were at all deceived on the subject. Every man's secret character somehow makes itself felt in the air that surrounds him, and certain facts had transpired with regard to George Courtenay which laws divine and human have qualified by very ugly names. But the world has a marvelously convenient way of settling such matters. People solemnly accept and believe (chiefly on Sundays) in the eternal truths revealed by the Holy God, and then they go and systematically act

as if those truths were lies. How would the brilliant crowd in some ball-room have been startled had a voice proclaimed in their midst, that the noble-looking man whose frank gayety charmed them, and whose soft tones echoed on their ears in gentle love-songs, would one day be a condemned soul,—the denizen of hell, the companion of devils ! Yet, according to the belief they openly professed, he could be nothing else,—unless he repented, which they knew well he would be exceedingly sorry to do.

It would seem as if in the world it was sufficient that a vice should be fashionable and almost universal to transfigure it into a virtue, or at least into a mild weakness ; and crime well dressed and aristocratic is received with flattering warmth, which, when it appears clad in tatters and vulgarity, is denounced according to the laws of eternal righteousness. Devout old ladies, who were extremely rigid as to the morals of their servants, watched in a flutter of anticipation the attentions of Colonel Courtenay to their unmarried daughters, earnestly hoping that they would ripen into a substantial proposal ; while worthy gentlemen, who spoke loudly at county meetings on pauper dissoluteness, eagerly invited him down to their country houses, and were delighted to see their sons in close fellowship with this fine dashing officer.

Of such were Sir John and Lady Talbot—"excellent people," as every one said when their names were mentioned ; so amiable and benevolent, so ready always to further schemes for the suppression of vice, under whatever form they appeared ; so solicitous for the moral improvement of their tenantry, and the mental culture of the pauper children ; so rigid in dismissing every one

from their employment whose conduct failed in being irreproachable, and yet, with the most entire complacency and self-satisfaction, they handed over their young daughter to be the wife of Colonel Courtenay. From her infancy upward they had hired nurses and governesses of the most immaculate description, to guard her from the faintest breath of evil; and now, in her riper youth, they called on a bishop to sanction, with much religious fervor, a union with a man whose inner life they well knew no pure eye could dare to look upon. Yet they were not conscious hypocrites; the sense of their inconsistencies never struck them; no voice in the silent night thrilled on their conscience and bade them give account of the soul of the child they had linked to unblushing and unrepented sin. Surely they had done their best for her? They had given her a good position, a luxurious life, and a husband possessed of every attraction earth could offer. Nothing more could be desired in their theology, which consisted in taking with them through life just as much religion as they could carry, without inconvenience, on the easy-going paths of this world. As to the beautiful Julia herself, she never thought of inquiring into the private character of her husband, simply because she was as much in love with his handsome face as it was possible for her shallow nature to be.

Humanity is full of strange phenomena, at least it seems so to our veiled eyes, and few perhaps appear more inexplicable than the existence of such a character as Mrs. Courtenay's. If this world and all it contains were to last forever, it would be sufficiently comprehensible; but she seemed to possess no element of mind or spirit which one could imagine expanding into a

solemn immortality. A soul forever blessed, it is, thank Heaven! easy to believe in; a state of everlasting wickedness, it is, alas! not more difficult to conceive; but a soul *eternally frivolous*, how can such a thing be—what possible position can it hold in the grand infinity of holiness which shall hereafter be made manifest?

There was one other person in the room with Colonel Courtenay and his wife, who had been sitting silent at a little distance while they finished breakfasting. It was his only sister, Ernestine Courtenay, who had come, to witness his embarkation, in order that she might take leave of him at the very last moment. She was exceedingly like her brother in appearance, save in two particulars. She had his face and features, but not so great a share of beauty; while she did possess the spirituality of expression which he so entirely lacked. Thus, though no one would have called her remarkably handsome, there was something in the hidden soul within which gave her an indescribable charm, felt by all who approached her.

She had a peculiar look of gentleness, and her voice, even at its gayest, had a pathetic tone which was singularly touching; yet the prevailing expression of her face was not mere sweetness only; there were lines of intense thought, making a shadow below the clear eyes, and there was a sensitive tremor about the mouth, which spoke of feelings too deep to be tranquil, while the whole mobile countenance was the instantaneous interpreter of every thought that passed through her mind. It was curious to watch the play of her features when animated: the changes of her ever-varying expression were rapid as the alternations of light and

shade on a landscape over which the summer clouds are flying. Even then, as she sat motionless, the thoughts of her heart might be read unmistakably in her eyes. Her gaze was fixed on her brother with a look of intense affection, which showed that to him had been given in largest measure that peculiar trusting love which an orphan girl so naturally lavishes on her eldest brother.

Ernestine had never known father or mother; and George, her natural protector and guide, had been her dearest upon earth, until the day came, a few months before, when the man who was to be her future husband had won from her a yet more absorbing love.

She had always looked up to her brother with thorough admiration and respect; to her innocent faith he was all that the world, better informed, pretended to consider him. She alone, perhaps of all who knew him, was in ignorance of his real character. That man must be base indeed who can let the poison of his own life taint a sister's mind; and one strong motive for the warmth with which he returned her affection was the consciousness of her misplaced trust in him. He knew that she did but love an ideal, yet it was pleasant in her presence to fancy himself for a time the noble high-souled man she imagined him; and there was a sense of rest and security, knowing the world as he did, in the sure possession of this guileless love, which had never failed him.

All her life long, then, Ernestine had met with nothing but kindness from her brother. When he first went to India, now seven years ago, and left her, a sensitive girl of eighteen, to the care of her aunt, Lady Beaufort, she nearly broke her heart, and pined for

many months, till her thoughts were diverted by the severe illness of her only other brother, Reginald, who was younger than herself, and whom she had known but little till she was called to nurse him. When he recovered, however, after two or three years spent in Italy to ward off his rather ominous delicacy of chest, he left her to go to college, and again she began to long for George's return, till, as we have said, a love stronger even than that which she felt for him, came to lure her soul into that species of idolatry which a woman is so sorely tempted to bestow on the one who can alone take the first place in her heart. Her marriage with Hugh Lingard, however, could not take place for some time. His father had left him an old manor-house, and an estate so heavily burdened with debt, that his present income was entirely swallowed up by the claims he had to meet; so that he could not afford to lose a fellowship he had at one of the colleges in Greyburgh, of which his marriage would deprive him; but he held a small office under Government, with the certainty of obtaining a more lucrative one in the course of two or three years, which would then enable them, with the addition of Ernestine's fortune, to settle comfortably.

Ernestine's great desire had been to spend this interval with her brother George, with whom she had lived since his return from India, and who had seemed not unwilling to agree to her wish that he should exchange into another regiment and remain in England. All these plans were, however, completely overthrown by the passionate attachment he suddenly conceived for Julia Talbot, and the marriage in which it speedily resulted. There was no longer any reason why he

should remain in England, and all thought of keeping her place near him vanished from Ernestine's mind. She had too much good sense to think of living with him even if he had not returned to India, and she felt that he was lost to her as the friend and companion he had been. In her simplicity, however, she believed that his fierce love for the beautiful Julia would last forever; and if he were happy, her unselfish affection was satisfied, even though finally separated from him. Her only request was that she might be with him to the last, and she had joined him the day before at Sir John Talbot's, whither he had returned with his wife from their brief wedding tour.

Breakfast was over at last, and Colonel Courtenay looked at his watch.

"It is later than I thought," he said; "Julia, love, we have only half an hour before the time when we must be on board. Are all your preparations made?"

"No, indeed! I have a great deal to do yet; I must change my dress, and settle what hat I shall wear. Can you not send and tell them to wait for an hour or two?"

He smiled and shook his head. "No, I am afraid you must try to get ready; but I dare say, with the help of your maid, you will manage it."

She answered that she would try, and left the room to spend the last moments of sojourn in her own country, the home of her girlhood, gone forever, in discussing with her maid the most becoming costume for her appearance on board.

"One half hour," said Ernestine, as the door closed on her sister-in-law, "only one half hour more." She rose and took a low seat at her brother's side—"Oh, dear George, when shall I see you again?"

"Who can tell, Ernie? It is not my present intention to stay many years in India. I only want to get my promotion, and then I shall retire. I don't think Julia will like the life out there, though she fancies she will."

"Well, so far as I am concerned, a few years is the same as a lifetime; in the uncertainty of the future, I must count on you no more as a part of my happiness, when once you have left me for an indefinite period."

He did not deny this; but after a moment's silence, he said, "You have never told me what your plans are, Ernestine. How are you going to dispose of yourself when we are gone? I suppose you will return to Lady Beaufort's till Lingard carries you off."

"I do not know what else I can do at present; but you cannot think how I dread returning to the hollow objectless life I lived with Aunt Beaufort before you came home. I do so want to try and be of some use in the world."

"Why, Ernestine, you alarm me! You are not going to turn out a strong-minded female, I hope, and raise a regiment of riflemen, or establish a printing-press for the publication of pamphlets on the rights of women?"

"I don't think I show symptoms of being very strong-minded just now," said Ernestine, laughing, "when I am half breaking my heart at parting from a brother who cares very little about me. And as to the sect who want to raise women out of their natural position, I utterly detest and abjure their opinions; they are contrary to laws both human and divine, in my opinion."

"I am relieved to hear you say so. I confess to having a great horror of the ladies who are benefactresses of mankind."

She lifted up her sweet serious face toward him :
"George, I can quite understand your laughing at this sort of thing ; but, after all, it cannot be meant that women should spend their lives in dressing and visiting, and working at their embroidery. It must be possible for them to be useful to others, without going beyond their own province."

"But what then do you mean to do?"

"I have no defined idea as yet. Till now, you know, George, I have thought of nothing but the happiness of being with you, and I have a bright future to look forward to in hope ; but the two or three years I have to pass first, are too long a time to waste in amusements which weary me beyond expression ; and I am sure of one thing—there must be in this great suffering world some work even for me, weak and ignorant as I am."

He respected her earnestness, and did not wish to vex her ; but all such ideas were very repugnant to him.

"Lady Beaufort will not countenance your philanthropic schemes, Ernie. Do you mean to act without her chaperonage in your future plans?"

"I do not think there is any reason why I should not. I am five and twenty, and I have an independent fortune. Hugh Lingard is really the only person who has a right to control my actions now ; and although I would not do anything to distress Aunt Beaufort, I do not see why I should not quietly go my own way without consulting her."

"My dear Ernestine, I am afraid it is a dreary prospect. I can conceive nothing much duller, or more oppressive, than a life of general benevolence."

"But it will be life with a purpose, and that will

make up for everything," exclaimed Ernestine, her eyes lighting up with enthusiasm.

It was a specimen of Colonel Courtenay's selfishness, that he had never inquired into his sister's plans till this moment; and his heart smote him somewhat as he felt that, if he had spoken to her earlier, he might have advised her against those schemes which appeared to him so absurd and unsatisfactory, and which, he believed, would only end in disappointment and annoyance when the realities of the world came to dispel her visionary dreams. To make any serious attempt now, however, to alter her intentions, was more trouble than he could inflict on his indolence.

"I wish I had known what an eccentric career you were planning for yourself, Ernie, as I should have tried to dissuade you from anything of the kind; and I am afraid Lingard will not, he is so strong on letting every one follow the bent of their own inclinations. I ought to have asked you what your plans were before now; but the truth is, that little witch Julia has occupied my thoughts entirely for some time past. I am seriously afraid, Ernestine, that you will find these new fancies very impracticable."

"They are not new fancies, dearest George. The life of mere society has never satisfied me, and I brooded over these thoughts long before you came home; only I did not think of putting them into execution, because I was looking forward to living with you; they have revived with double force, however, since I knew of your marriage, and I only want to find some way of giving them shape and reality, for the next two or three years at least."

"But in the mean time, when you leave us to-day,

where are you going? Do you return to the Beauports at once?"

"No; I have almost made up my mind to go down to Greyburgh to see Reginald. His letters, which are very rare, have made me anxious for some time past. He admits that his bodily health is weak and failing, and he seems to me to be depressed and unsettled in mind."

Colonel Courtenay shrugged his shoulders. "As to Reginald, he is a perfect enigma to me. I saw one of the undergraduates of his college the other day, who was telling me about him. It is incredible that a young man of one and twenty should spend his life dreaming over theories which have no more connection with this world than the man in the moon. I hear he sits up half the night, perplexing his brain with all manner of theological inquiries: *à son âge je m'occupais de bien autre chose!*"

"Reginald was always thoughtful and quiet," said Ernestine, "but so reserved that I never could thoroughly penetrate into his mind."

"Well, I must go and see what Julia is doing, or we shall really be too late. We may not meet for a long time to come, Ernie. I think I shall give you a substitute for myself in the shape of Fury, if you like to have him," and he pointed to the wise-looking terrier, who sat with his speaking brown eyes fixed on his master.

"Oh I should, indeed," said Ernestine, her face brightening with pleasure. "I have taken care of him in your absence, and he has been such a friend to me—so intelligent and affectionate. I assure you he com-

forted me in the wisest manner the night after your marriage, when I was feeling rather dreary."

"Well, I herewith present him to you," said Colonel Courtenay, lifting the dog by the neck and swinging him into his sister's lap. "Fury, be faithful to your new mistress. I dare say he would have died in India, so you and he will be mutually benefited." And stooping down he kissed her affectionately, and left the room.

CHAPTER III.

ON BOARD THE "HERO."

THEY stood at last on the deck of the "Hero," which in ten minutes more was to weigh anchor. The soldiers' wives had been stowed away in the narrow limits they were to occupy for some time to come, and their friends had all been sent on shore. None but the passengers remained, with the exception of Miss Courtenay, who was allowed to wait till the last moment; but the boat which was to take her on shore danced on the waters at the side of the ship, along with several others containing persons anxious to watch the final departure. Colonel Courtenay was standing on the poop talking to the captain, whose quick eye all the while was glancing everywhere to see that his orders were being obeyed. Ernestine leant on her brother's arm, clinging to these last moments when she could still see his face and hear his voice. Mrs. Courtenay, seated at a little distance, was playing the coquette in the most refined and lady-like manner possible with some of the officers of her husband's regiment. Ernestine remembered the scene long afterward; everything looked so bright and prosperous, with the sunshine sparkling on the blue waters and on the white sails of the ship.

Suddenly a great noise and confusion was heard at the lower end of the vessel. There was a scuffling of feet, a clamor of voices, and an occasional volley of

oaths. A struggle of some kind was evidently going on, and the captain called out angrily to know what was the matter. , One of the ship's officers came up to him at once :

"A woman, sir, who was found secreted in the hold, and refuses to go on shore."

"Is she not on the War Office List, then?"

"No, sir, she is not a soldier's wife at all. Sergeant Dale and Private Smith say they know her for an impostor. She tried yesterday to get herself passed, among the women at the Depot, with false papers."

"Send the jade ashore at once, then, we have no time to lose; we must be off in five minutes."

"They are trying to get her into the boat, sir, but she won't go. She is like a wild cat, and clings to every thing she can lay hold of. It took three men to get her up from the hold."

"Oh, bother! Hoist her overboard with a rope, then. Threaten her with a ducking for her pains, there are plenty of boats to drop her into. I can't have the hands hindered from their work."

The officer touched his cap and went off to obey orders. In another moment a shriek so wild and thrilling that it startled every one on board, rang through the air. A figure was seen to burst through the crowd of sailors, with streaming hair and outstretched arms, dashing them aside with a force which seemed almost superhuman. With one bound she broke away, and leapt from the forecastle, flying rather than running along the deck, up the steps to the poop, and on, till she flung herself down at Colonel Courtenay's feet, and clasped his knees with a power which he could not resist. She threw back her head, showing a face, once beauti-

ful, but now distorted by an intensity of agony and passion that smote the by-standers with a sense of terrible mental pain ; her long black hair, wet with the dews of anguish that stood on her forehead, fell back in masses from her flushed face ; her dark eyes were full of wildness ; her whole frame quivered, and her dress, torn and disordered, was stained with blood, from the injuries she had received in her struggle with the men.

It was a pitiable spectacle, but it was left to the tone of her wild mournful voice to convey to the by-standers a conviction of the utter misery that was desolating the soul of the unhappy girl.

Her flight from the one end of the vessel to the other had been so instantaneous, that the breathless impassioned words she now spoke seemed but the prolongation of the shriek that still appeared to echo in their ears. Clinging to Courtenay as if her life depended on the tenacity of her grasp ; looking at him, speaking to him only, she gasped out, "George, George, my own George, save me, save me!—don't let them send me away ; I must go with you, I will go with you ; I cannot live without you—indeed I cannot : I have tried it, and I cannot ; I must be with you—nothing shall tear me from you !"

At this unexpected address, spoken loud enough to be heard by all present, a look of significant meaning passed among the officers of Colonel Courtenay's regiment, and from them to the captain and the men who stood round ; while Courtenay himself looked down on the girl at his feet with an expression of absolute fury.

"Is the woman mad or drunk ?" he exclaimed, struggling with a cruel violence to disengage himself from

her convulsive grasp; "how dare you attack me in this way? Here, men, drag this woman off, some of you."

At these words a cry more appalling than that which had startled them before burst from the poor girl's lips. She lifted up her eyes to his face, piteous with their expression of sorrowful dismay:

"O George, my dear George, don't you know me? I am Lois, your own poor Lois, that you said you would love forever and ever. Am I so changed? I dare say I am, for I have cried my heart out after you pretty near; but look, it is me myself—here is the ring you gave me, and the locket with your own hair in it, and the bracelet—look!" And the unhappy girl strove with her trembling hands to show him the trinkets, which she thought might convince him of the identity he knew too well. Courtenay literally stamped with rage and impatience, especially as he saw the smile which was appearing on the face of every man round him, to whom the scene was sufficiently intelligible.

"The woman is raving mad;" and he made another futile attempt to shake her off. "Leave hold, I tell you, or I'll have you sent to jail for a month."

"Me! me sent to jail! O George, it is you that are mad, not to know me; you can't have forgotten me; you took me from my home; you took my good name; you made father curse me; but I don't care for that—I'd do it all again, I love you so; and you kept me six months—such a happy time; don't you remember? It is but three months since you left me. You sent me to a gay house, and said you'd come to fetch me, and I've waited and waited, and longed for you so; then I heard you were going to India, and I knew I must come. I

can't live without you—I can't, and I won't; and oh! George, you will take me with you, won't you? I'll be your servant, or anything you please, only don't drive me away. I love you, I love you so, dear, dear George!" and she burst into tears, laying her face against him, and kissing the fierce hands with which, all the time she spoke, he had been trying to loosen her hold. Not one of the men moved a step to help him; their sympathies were evidently with the girl.

But now Mrs. Courtenay, who had been engaged in a lively conversation at a little distance, began to be attracted by the noise and excitement, and when looking round she saw a woman clinging to her husband, a sudden color flushed her face, and she came forward, saying, "Colonel Courtenay, what is the meaning of this?"

"Only a drunken woman, my love, who mistakes me for some one else." Then suddenly stooping down over the girl, he said to her in an energetic whisper:

"Lois, you fool, I do know you, but that lady is my wife. You can never be with me again; you might have known I had done with you forever when I sent you away. Go on shore quietly, and I'll give you some money; but if you dare to say another word to me now, I'll have you taken up by the police as sure as I live."

He knew her! That beautiful lady was his wife! He had done with her forever. She must not *dare* to speak to him. He would give her in charge. As sentence after sentence revealed to the wretched girl her true position, a stillness as of death seemed to settle down upon her; the passion of her manner died away; the irrepressible burst of feeling ceased with a sudden gasp;

the crimson flush on her face faded to an ashy paleness ; her hands relaxed their hold on Courtenay ; her arms fell by her side ; her lips parted, but no breath appeared to stir upon them ; and she scarcely seemed to live, but that her eyes, alive with agony, were fixed wide open with a strange fascinated stare on his face.

He saw at once that she was finally subdued, and made a sign to some of the men to take her away. Two sailors came forward, they raised her gently, and set her on her feet. She made no resistance ; it was as though they were dealing with a corpse, but for the staring mournful eyes. Some money which Colonel Courtenay had secretly thrust into her hand fell from her powerless fingers and rolled on the deck. A young naval officer standing near, with an unmistakable expression of disgust at the scene, kicked it away with his foot into the water, and then went to help the men in taking the poor stricken girl as carefully as possible to the boat. They half carried, half supported her along the deck, and she neither spoke nor struggled, only, as they moved her, her head turned mechanically, so that her eyes with their look of anguish left not the face of him who was her best beloved on earth, and her bitterest enemy.

They took her down the gangway and placed her in a boat. Then the officer and sailors came on deck again and stood watching her ; the boat shot out from the vessel's side. She was seen seated in the stern, upright, her head turned back to the ship, the haggard gaze still seeking the figure of Courtenay, who stood conspicuous on the poop. Rapidly she was borne to the shore, soon did her form become lost among many others ; but so long as it was visible, however indistinctly,

those eyes, tortured, despairing, glared back through the sunlight on the face that had charmed her to destruction. And when he lies an expiring man upon his death-bed, or on the battle-field, shall not these eyes look back upon him still with their remembered agony?

She was gone, and Colonel Courtenay breathed freely again. He was too entirely a man of the world to feel in the least seriously embarrassed at the situation in which he found himself placed; his *savoir faire* would have brought him through worse difficulties than this. The beautiful Julia was no deep thinker, and a whispered regret that her delicate nerves should have been pained by so disagreeable an object as a drunken woman, accompanied by one of his charming smiles, was quite sufficient to restore her self-satisfied equanimity; and in another moment the incident had almost passed from her memory, as she glanced her bright eyes from side to side to see if the grace of her attitude was observed as she leant over the ship's side and took a sentimental leave of her native country.

As to the captain of the ship and his own officers, Courtenay knew well that they perfectly understood the whole affair; but he also knew that they would offer no open criticism on the private conduct of a man in his official position. So he merely said a few easy words, which showed that he assumed them to be imperturbably dense on the subject, and then let the matter drop as completely as if it had never occurred. But there was one with whom Courtenay attempted neither palliation nor deceit. Some instinct withheld him from trying any such means with his pure-hearted sister. His hope was that she had neither understood the scene, nor heard the words he spoke to Lois when his

wife drew near. He was mistaken. Ernestine had heard every syllable, and she would have understood it all, if she could have brought herself to believe in the wickedness of the brother she so loved and trusted; but such lessons are among the hardest we have to learn in this hard life; and she stood there, her cheek now flushed, now deadly pale, with a crowd of bewildering thoughts careering through her mind, and one maddening doubt lying underneath them all, which she felt, if realized, would banish all happiness from her intercourse with her brother forever. Her brother! beloved, admired all her life long, could it be that he was wicked, cruel, heartless? Her childhood's idol, to whom the incense of such true affection had been offered, had he fallen—fallen into the ashes of the worst corruption? And that poor girl! How her whole soul burned with compassion for the utter misery which her woman's heart could understand so well; even while the mere thought of its probable cause sent the vivid flush so painfully to her very forehead. Some one had been that hapless woman's curse. It could not be her own dear brother. Yet—what if it were? She shivered from head to foot at the bare thought. So well had she loved him, that the girl's agony seemed to fall like heavy guilt on her own soul; and she felt that if it were so indeed, his victim must become her own most sacred charge. She must know the truth; she could not rest in so hateful a doubt, and the moments were flying fast; already it was time she left the ship. She tried to raise her eyes to her brother; she tried to whisper a few hesitating words, but the nature of the subject checked even the faintest effort. To a stranger she could have spoken better than to him, and already

the opportunity was gone. The captain came forward, raised his cap, and, with a regret for hurrying Miss Courtenay, said that "time was up," the men were weighing the anchor, and the boat that waited for her could no longer stay alongside. Colónel Courtenay felt that fortune favored him, for he had read the meaning of her half-averted face, her quivering lip, and crimsoned downcast face; and now he put his arm round his sister, kissed her affectionately, and bade her a tender farewell. "Take care of yourself, dearest Ernestine, and write soon; we shall long to hear from you."

He spoke in his own winning, open manner, and her heart bounded up to him once more. She laid her head fondly on his shoulder, and tried, in a choked voice, to say good-by; then he gave place to Julia, who lightly kissed her on both cheeks *à la Française*, and murmured some pretty meaningless speech, and in another moment Ernestine was parted from them both, and seated in the boat to which the captain had conducted her. One vigorous stroke of the oars, and it bounded from the vessel's side. She looked up, and saw through her tear-dimmed eyes her brother and his wife standing at the gangway that they might watch her to the last. As they caught sight of her, Courtenay lifted his hat in a parting salute. She saw the sunlight falling on the rich masses of his dark-brown hair, and his fine face lighted up with the bright smile that had won him many a heart, and, leaning on his strong arm, was the delicate, graceful figure of his wife, stooping down to look at Ernestine, with her fair hair escaping from her hat and half hiding her lovely radiant countenance. Ernestine looked up eagerly at them as they thus appeared before her in their beauty and happiness, seeking to learn by

heart, as it were, and print upon her memory that fair bright picture, that she might carry it away with her to cherish its remembrance in the long years of absence. But suddenly a shudder passed over her. What if, instead of the charming countenance that shone so bright by her brother's side, there ought to have been, by all Divine laws, by all that is truth, and honor, and equity, that face, pale, haggard, and sorrow-smitten, which she had seen fade from its look of passionate love and entreaty to the fixed, hopeless stare of utter bewilderment, as the low whisper hissed upon her ear, "Lois, you fool!"

Little, indeed, do we know in what state of feeling an hour may find us. If any one had told Ernestine Courtenay that she would see the figure of her brother lessening in the distance as she was being borne away from him, to meet perhaps no more, and that her thoughts would not be with him, but with another—a stranger in name and history,—she could not have believed it; and yet to that unhappy one, known only by the common power of suffering, her heart was turning now with pain and grief, in which her brother's departure had no share; and her first eager glance when she stepped on shore was not to the ship, already gliding fast away, but to the motley crowd on the pier, in the hope that she might see among them the poor girl whom she was resolved at all hazards to find. She looked, however, in vain. Many faces were there, and many sorrowful enough, but the one living aspect of despair which had so riveted her attention was not among them. Ernestine inquired of the by-standers if any had seen her, and she was met with the contradictory accounts which invariably follow a question

addressed to a crowd. Several persons had seen her, but all differed as to the direction she had taken on landing from the boat. Ernestine's servant, who had been with her on board, stood with an expression of intense disgust on his face as his mistress thus demeaned herself (in his estimation) by asking questions about a person whose existence he conceived she ought to ignore. At last, seeing that she was actually going to start in search of the girl, his superior wisdom could stand it no longer, and advancing, he ventured to suggest that Miss Courtenay should allow him to engage a policeman to carry on the pursuit, which he felt certain she herself would find utterly impracticable.

Ernestine could not but admit that he was right, much as she disliked using such an agent under the circumstances. The chances of her own search being successful in such a place as Seamount were certainly small enough, and she trusted that it might be possible to discover the poor girl's abode without letting her find out that the police had been in any way employed in the search. Ernestine, therefore, herself gave orders, with many minute directions, to the man whom her servant brought to her; and having received his assurance that she should know every particular of the girl's position by the next morning at latest, she left the matter in his hands, and returned slowly to her desolate rooms at the hotel.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LAST NIGHT.

THAT day was drawing to a close. Within the streets there were all the usual tokens of approaching night: the shopmen were lighting their lamps for the later customers, the laborers were hurrying home, the diners-out were arriving at the houses of their friends—all things were as they had been the day before, and as they would be when the next day came. Yet strange it is to feel, as the weeks pass over us unmarked and uneventful, that there is no one day of all those that make up our years that is not to some human being the most awful and portentous that can be for them in time and in eternity—the climax of their sufferings, or the very crisis of their doom. How often is the soft air, as it passes over our cheek, laden with the last sigh of a ruined soul gone to its dread account, or vibrating with the bullet-shot which has made some wretch a murderer! No day—no hour rather—that is not burdened with some fearful struggle, some great crime, some deep despair. We think we know enough of this world's teeming sorrows, and that we hear too often the many mingled cry that ever rises from the suffering heart of all'humanity; but how awful must be the sight on which the Omniscient Eyes look down, to whom no tear is hid, no pang unknown of all the weltering mass of this earth's agony! How awful that tremendous

sight—fruit of the ancient curse—atoning Calvary alone can tell. For us, we may well give thanks that we know not even all the sorrows that may be gathered in the narrow limits of a single human heart; and that perhaps the one most near our own.

The evening was closing in, and through the busy streets there went a figure—the same that had hastened the day before so rapidly toward the emigrant depot. The same, yet not the same: gone was the quick elastic tread, the energy of purpose, the strong, passionate life gleaming in the dark eye and flushing on the fevered cheek, which then had been so marked. Now all was languid, hopeless, apathetic, in the feeble creeping steps, the nerveless arms and drooping head. The tall figure seemed to have collapsed, and was now the form of a woman broken down—it might be with age, or it might be with sorrow. She seemed to have a definite object, and to be guiding her steps toward some settled goal; but so feebly, so wearily, that none but a close observer would have thought her course was anything but aimless wandering. This time there was no impetus to carry her through the crowded streets, and she was jostled from side to side without appearing conscious of it. Once a rough carter passing by threw her against the iron railings of an area, and she would have fallen had not his companion caught her on his arm.

"Why, girl, you don't seem to know where you are going," he said, as he steadied her on her feet. She looked at him for a moment with a dreamy, unconscious gaze; then, as she seemed to understand his meaning, she shook her head, and said in a faint voice, "O yes, I do; I know where I am going too well—too well." He left her, and she wandered on, and presently she

came to a brilliantly lighted shop, where the windows were filled with children's toys of every description. At one of the huge squares of plate-glass stood two little girls, their arms round each other's necks, gazing in ecstasy at some of the glittering treasures displayed before them. Just as Lois was passing them, the one said to the other :

"O Mary, shouldn't we be happy if we had those beautiful dolls!" She stopped and looked at them: "Happy, would you be?—then you shall have them." She went into the shop, pulled out a gay purse, and bought the coveted toys, with a lavish carelessness as to the price which astonished the shopman. Then she went and thrust them into the hands of the children, who looked at her, and then at their new possessions, in utter amazement.

"Shall you be happy now?" she said to them, with a sad sweetness in her tone.

"O yes, yes!" exclaimed the children, almost shouting with delight.

"I am very glad of it," she said, "for I shall never be happy any more;" and then she walked away, wiping the tears from her eyes with her hand. Soon she had left the principal streets and entered on the outskirts of the town. Still she held on, taking the direction of the beach, and soon the houses grew fewer, the lights scarce, and the eye could see beyond the town out into the desolate night. When she had nearly passed all the streets she stopped, looked at the purse which she still held in her hand, and then glanced all round as if in search of some one on whom to bestow it. Presently an old man came out of a wretched house and tottered along, guiding himself with a stick, and evidently very

feeble. She went up to him and touched him on the shoulder: "You are very poor, are you not?"

"I should think so!" he exclaimed with an angry exclamation; "none poorer, though many makes more cry."

"Take this then," she said, dropping the purse into his hand. He started, felt its weight, then, struggling feebly to take off his hat, exclaimed, "God bless you, my dear lady; you be a good one, you be!"

She left him and went on, then suddenly turned back and came up to him.

"Say that again," she said.

"Say what, my dear?" said the old man, who was fastening up the purse with his shaking hands. "I'll say anything you like, for there's meat, and drink, and 'baccy for me in this here purse for a month to come. What be I to say?"

"Say that—that which you said about a blessing."

"Was it 'God bless you,' I said, my dear? I'll say it as often as ever you please, and good reason too, for it is little enough I get most days for the asking, let alone such a present as this when I had said never a word. God bless you a thousand times over, and I hope He will."

She listened eagerly, then cast a wistful glance up to heaven, as though she would fain know if there was any chance of the prayer being heard; but the sight of the darkening sky seemed to bring no thought of comfort to her, for she drooped her head again and sighed heavily.

"Anyhow they are good words to hear for the last," she murmured, as she once more took her solitary way along the water's edge.

And now all human habitations were left far behind, and she had entered on a solitude as complete, at that late hour, as if she were many miles from any town. The scene was cheerless in the extreme: the waning twilight half revealed, half hid the long low beach, with its black masses of dank seaweed and the slimy reptiles creeping to and fro among them; the dark restless waters moaning heavily as they beat upon the unyielding sands; the lowering clouds rolling in heaving masses over the leaden sky. Far away on the horizon there gleamed one ghastly streak of light, where all that remained of the dying day was gathered, while over all the dreary landscape the rising wind went sighing in fitful gusts, rendering the damp air more bleak and chill. Well was this scene in keeping with the forlorn figure that now went stealing with dejected steps along the shore of that dark sea, shivering in the cold blast, and weeping helpless tears, which brought no relief to the dead weight at her heart. She went on till she came to a spot where a high rock rose abruptly out of the waves, and shelved back, forming a sort of little promontory, of which the farthest extremity was in deep water.

Up the steep ascent which led to the part overhanging the sea the poor girl toiled with painful steps till she stood on the summit, with nothing around her but the dark expanse of sullen heaving waters. She looked down upon them as they beat with heavy monotonous sound against the rock, and an expression of strange calmness passed over her wan face; then she cast a glance on all sides, and saw that no human being was in sight. She was alone with that leaden sky—that deep black sea—that sighing, mournful wind. Night

was falling fast, no one would pass there now till the sun should rise again; that sun which she had watched in its setting as we look upon the face of a dying friend whom we shall see no more. She had time before her yet, and with a long weary sigh she sunk down upon the rock, folded her arms on her knees, and laid her head upon them, while in a low calm voice she murmured, "Here, then, it must end."

Her own heart seemed to answer back and ask—"What must end?" Even her life!—her life of twenty years—her young strong life, with all its promise for this world, and all its responsibility for that which is to come. It must end; there was no question as to that, nor had there been any for the last few hours; but as she pronounced the sentence, the existence thus condemned seemed to pass in review before her, and drag her back in spite of herself to live it over again in thought from the first day of remembered infancy to this the last—the unendurable!

Her earliest recollection was very sweet and bright. The morning sunlight of a summer day shining on the cottage that had been her home, and was still her father's; the good old grandmother, who supplied the place of her dead mother, standing at the door, kissing her and stroking her curls as she sent her off to school; and herself an innocent little child bounding away over the dewy grass, singing and laughing in her careless glee with the merry birds that caroled from bush and bough.

That summer morning, and life all before her—oh, the anguish of the contrast with this dreary night, and death beneath her feet! She literally groaned as she thought of it, and cried out:

"O that I were a little maid once more, playing at my father's door!" In vain—in vain! What power could turn the tide of time, and bring the sin-stained woman back to childhood's innocence? God help those who know the utter agony of the burdened conscience, longing with that vain longing to recall the guileless days forever gone!

The next scene that came upon the rack of memory was one of sadness; yet, contrasted with her present bitter wretchedness, it seemed only to breathe of peace and love. This was the death of her old grandmother. It was from her that Lois had gained all the good that had come to her from external influences. Ever since the day when that good old woman had given the unconscious babe a "Bible name," in the hope that she might be as faithful as the Lois of St. Paul, to the night when on her death-bed she solemnly charged her to "attend her church, and keep from all bad ways," she had done her utmost to make the child as true a Christian as herself. Nor had the heavenly light she sought to kindle ever quite died out of the fallen girl's life. It was that which now burnt up as with an ardent flame her poor guilt-laden soul.

Lois remembered how they laid her grandmother in the green churchyard on a calm spring day. "And oh that I were lying by her!" burst from her lips, as again the hopeless yearning for the purer past rose madly within her. She remembered the touching burial service, and how it stilled her little heart, and dried her childish tears, she knew not how. Alas! what words of blessed hope would ever sound over her unhallowed grave! Then that scene passed away, and she saw her daily life as it went on for years; her father married

again; the stepmother was not unkind. Poor Lois had not that excuse, as too many have who share her evil deeds; but she was a weak, timid woman, wholly occupied with the children who were born to her, and quite unequal to coping with a proud, high spirit like that of Lois. She had scarce a place in the girl's remembrance, where two figures stood forth at first with equal prominence—her father, a hard, stern man, whose religion was his respectability, as it is that of nine-tenths of the better class of English peasants, and it was a *cultus* which he found well received by the divinity whom he most delighted to honor—the great lord whose park-gate he kept, and in whose lodge he lived rent free. He had but one code for his children, which from infancy they learned to understand: so long as they did well, and brought him to honor, they should share the best he had; but in the day they brought disgrace upon him, they might go seek a home and a father where they would, for they should have none under his roof-tree. Far brighter was the other face that looked in upon her from the relentless past—the sunny face and blue eyes of her own sister Annie. Annie! She started as the name came to her; she had not thought of her since this day had wrought a total change within her; but now, when face to face with death, all things wore their true aspect. The remembrance of her sister was the worst pang that had touched her yet, for she knew that her own ruin had induced that of the child she should have guarded with a mother's care.

She turned sickening from the thought, and welcomed with avidity in its place the glowing recollection which rushed over her of that day, the most beautiful and the

most disastrous of her life, whose memory even in that dark hour still thrilled her with a mournful semblance of delight. Well had it been for her if she had died or ever that day dawned upon her. Yet how little was there in its outward aspect to lead any to suppose that it had been to her indeed a day of doom, pregnant with the accursed seeds of sin, despair, and death. It had been like other days; she rose at early morn, went through her household duties singing like a bird, with light step and lighter heart, and then flew to deck herself for that part of her daily business which specially pleased her girlish vanity. It was her duty to open the gate for the visitors at the Hall, and many a time had she heard them remark upon the beauty which she well knew she possessed. On that day, as she looked at her face in the glass, she smiled with pleasure, for she saw it was fresh and blooming as the rose, which she had coquettishly placed at her waist; and though she longed in vain for a costly dress like those worn by the ladies at the Hall, she could console herself triumphantly with the reflection that none of them had such masses of glossy black hair as those she had just dressed with elaborate care.

She remembered how she went and sat down with some work in her hand, on which she would have it supposed she was engaged; but really her dark eyes were glancing hither and thither, noticing every one who passed, and seeking an aliment for the excitement her passionate nature craved.

At length she heard on the still summer air the quick ringing gallop of a horse, and soon on the winding road horse and rider appeared. She watched them as they came along; was there ever such a beautiful

sight!—that noble gentleman—for so he seemed to her, with his fine face and his haughty bearing, holding in his fiery black mare as it champed the bit and sent the foam in snow-white flakes on its glossy mane. She knew who he was, though she had never seen him before. He was coming as a visitor of some weeks to the Hall, and his servant had arrived that day with his luggage. He had been at the lodge, and had spoken of his master. Such a brave colonel, just come from India, where he had killed at least a score of blacks in the mutiny with his own right hand. So in Lois's eyes he was a hero.

She was ready waiting at the gate as he came up. She flung it wide open, and as he rode slowly in she looked up at him with an expression of undisguised admiration on her bright blushing face. Something in her glance attracted him; he looked down at her, and remained struck with some surprise at the brilliancy of her fresh youthful beauty. He made a trifling remark, which brought light into her eyes and a gay smile over all her face. She answered him, glancing up with a look, half coy, half admiring; and when at last he rode slowly on toward the house, he gazed back more than once at the pretty figure leaning against the gate and watching him.

Next day he sauntered up to the lodge, and stood talking in the little garden with Lois—and the next, and the next; why linger over the sickening details? Soon they walked together daily in the wood at some little distance, where she went to meet him. Colonel Courtenay stayed through the whole shooting season at the Hall. By the time the day of his departure came,

Lois loved him with her whole heart and soul, and desired nothing so much as that he should know it; her ears were closed forever to all voices in heaven or on earth alike save his; and his least word alone governed her will. She saw no more the far-off glory resting on the delectable hills, of which her dead teacher had told her; only the sight of his dear face was light and life to her; and all things that pertained to peace, and honor, and a quiet conscience were torn from her soul in the whirlwind of passion.

It was to this that he had willed to bring her, working thereunto with calm, deliberate forethought. So when he left the Hall he rode away on his beautiful black mare which was to take him to the station, some miles distant; and his host came to the door with him, and took leave of this brave, honorable man with the highest esteem, and Lois's father held the gate open for him, as his daughter somehow was not at home; and this noble colonel smiled as the man touched his hat, and threw him a guinea, which he thought a very handsome gratuity, and then he galloped away to the station, and walked in among passengers and porters with an air of lordly ease. His servant met him, grave and respectful, of whom he asked the question, "Which carriage?" and he was conducted to one where sat a woman closely veiled. He sprang in, the train darted off, and never more, in all the retributive ages of eternity, can that wretched man undo the fearful ruin he has worked on that poor lost soul.

Three months of intoxicating delight—the recollection of them rushed over her like a delirious dream. A villa at Richmond, servants at her command, beautiful dresses, a fine horse to ride,—these were as nothing

compared to the wild joy of being with the object of her idolatry.

But in the course of that brief fever of pleasure she was pierced with one sharp pang, which seemed for a moment to tear the veil from her eyes and show her what she was, and whither tending. A friend of Colonel Courtenay's, who had been staying at the Hall, had seen and admired her sister Annie; but lacking that indomitable determination to minister to his own gratification at all times which characterized Courtenay, he had regretted that she was a girl of good character, and thought of her no more. Now, the sight of Lois, and his friend's superior villainy, recalled the wicked thought and ripened it to crime.

At his suggestion, Courtenay told Lois to write and invite Annie to come and visit her. Annie! At the very thought her proud wayward heart sank within her. Anything but that. She saw her again, the little child, so sweet, so innocent, kneeling at her grandmother's knee to say her evening prayer, "Pray, God, bless my sister Lois." Oh, whatever she was herself, whatever she might be hereafter, she could not betray that innocent child! For the first time she resisted; she clung to Courtenay, kissed his hands, and told him she could not obey. What! his bought slave dared to dispute his will? One word such as he could speak, one frown such as he could give, and she was at his feet in a moment; she would do whatever he pleased. She wrote, and told her sister she was married—married to a gentleman, and she must come and join her; that a like brilliant fate might be hers; and with that she sent her money for her journey, more than Annie had ever seen in her life before. The poor child was un-

happy at home since her sister's disappearance. She asked no leave of the stern father, but stole away to join the companion of her happy childhood in the home Lois had described to her; and she knew not "that the dead were there, and that her guests were in the depths of hell!"

One single day little Annie dwelt in that house of splendid infamy, bringing with her as it were an atmosphere of freshness and innocence which recalled to Lois the dewy fragrance of the early mornings when they gathered wild-flowers in the woods, and the pure serenity of the starlit nights when they slept on their little bed clasped in each other's arms. One day, and the next Annie's father summoned her home, and the gentleman whose admiring eyes had met her at every turn, when he was staying at the Hall a few months before, offered to drive her to the station; but Lois heard the laughing communication to Courtenay of his real plans in taking the girl with him to the railway. Annie went, well pleased with the novel excitement of the rapid motion, and with the opportunity of displaying the hat and feathers which this same gentleman had given her that morning; but thinking no evil beyond the indulgence of her coquettish vanity. As the horses bounded forward at their master's touch, she turned her laughing face and kissed her hand to Lois, and from that hour her sister never saw her more, nor did her light step ever again cross the threshold of her father's home.

And, alas! Lois soon ceased to think of her; for the first shadows of the night of sorrow, whose total darkness had now overtaken her, were deepening round her even then. She lived but in one, and that one was beginning to neglect, or rather to forsake her. Days and

weeks he left her now alone, and the look of calm contempt with which he met her reproaches froze into her very soul. Then there came a day after his absence had been longer than it had ever been before, when a letter was brought to her from him, worded almost as tenderly as in the first rapturous days of their acquaintance; he told her he must be absent some time, and he could no longer keep her in the villa she now inhabited. She must go to a "boarding-house" in London, which he indicated, and remain there till she heard from him. He bade her enjoy herself, and follow in all things the example of the companions she would find leading a merry life there.

This letter was brought by Courtenay's confidential servant, who had orders to remove her; and Lois, so soon as she had read it, began with tears of passionate agony to ask when she should see his master, and implored of the man to let her go to him at once. He answered, with an insolent sneer, that her only chance was to do as the Colonel desired; the gay house was the place for her, and doubtless she would see Colonel Courtenay there, "or half a dozen others as good," he muttered audibly. Lois felt to the innermost depths of her heart that the time was come when she must drink the bitter dregs of the intoxicating cup of pleasure, which the cruel hand of this very honorable gentleman had held to her lips; but she never guessed the full extent of her calamity. She had ever believed his lightest word, and she believed the mocking promise he made her now. She was to remain there till she heard from him; therefore she did not hesitate to go to this place at once, clinging desperately to the only hope that remained to her of seeing him, without whom she knew

she could not live. She went, and she remained there waiting; waiting for the fulfillment of his word as men wait a reprieve from execution. Lost as she was, dead to the voice of conscience and the sense of moral right, she yet loathed the place, the life, and herself, who perforce lived in it. One thought alone sustained her: day and night one face was before her eyes, one voice in her ears; and the cry of her longing agony went out, hour after hour, to him who had taken her from her home and her God, imploring him to come and give her back at least the treasure for which she had paid that tremendous price. In vain! She might as well have called upon the vanished past to give her back the guilelessness of childhood. But still she trusted him, until one day she heard two men who frequented the house talking of Colonel Courtenay. They knew him, and she listened with a terrible anxiety which seemed to exhaust her very life. They spoke of his approaching departure for India, and mentioned that he was to sail in the "Hero" two days from that time. Five minutes later, Lois had crossed the threshold of that accursed house, and the night of Courtenay's departure found her on the lonely rock, the dank night dews falling on her unprotected head, the sullen waters chafing and moaning at her feet.

Yes; she had retraced her whole life to this hour; and now unto this hour she had come, and here, she echoed back as she began—here it must end. One stinging thought remained to her, however, from that sad retrospect—the thought of her sister Annie, lost—lost through her means! She dashed her head on the ground, and literally groaned when she thought of it. "O Annie, Annie! poor mother's darling, she must not come to an end like this." Suddenly she lifted up her head, raised herself on her knees, and prayed:

“Our Father which art in heaven, I dare not pray for myself—but for Annie—for Annie, oh let me pray! She did not know what she was doing, and I did. Oh save her, save her for the dear Lord’s sake. Amen.”

The prayer seemed to calm her anguish. "Perhaps God will let me do something for Annie," she murmured. "What was it grandmother used to say? 'He is full of compassion and of great goodness;' at least I will try. I shall die the easier for the chance that it may help her."

She took from her bosom a little ornamental pocket-book, cherished there because Courtenay had given it to her, and wrote on the page prepared for indelible writing these words:

"TO COLONEL COURTENAY.

"MY DEAR, DEAR GEORGE,—When you get this I shall be dead—dead and cold in the grave, where I'll never trouble you more; so I've nothing to ask you for myself. It is all over with me. You have forsaken and deceived me, and I can't live; that's all. I must die. Don't think I am blaming you, my dearest; for I love you still. Oh, how I love you! But I do want you to do one thing for pity's sake. I want you to save Annie—my poor little sister Annie. George—George, don't let her come to a death like mine. I tell you it is terrible. No one but you can save her; for you only know who took her away. I don't know his name myself. Oh, find her out, I beseech you, and send her home to father. It is the last thing I ask you. I can't write any longer. George, good-by; I want to die quick, for I can't bear this misery; so no more forever. —From your loving
LOIS."

no avenging justice and consenting crowd? Who is it that has said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay"?

Little shall it avail him that he sleeps securely now. Vengeance, too, may sleep awhile, but yet a little, and his condemned cell shall be the grave, his day of doom that resurrection morning, when the Judge of all the earth shall execute justice on him, and the witnessing crowd shall be the mighty multitude of quick and dead assembled before the great white throne, to hear for every soul that ever lived the sentence of the Eternal Truth.

CHAPTER V.

THE TRUTH REVEALED.

ERNESTINE COURTENAY returned to the hotel, after the departure of the "Hero," with some dread of the dreary evening before her. In general she was only too fond of solitude, but on this day she would gladly have escaped by any means from the uneasy thoughts that rankled in her mind. Feeling thus, it was with no small pleasure that she welcomed the companionship of the little terrier, Fury, whose speaking eyes beamed with delight from under the overhanging shaggy hair as she approached him. She had tested his powers of consolation before, and there is a very real comfort to be derived from the friendship of a dog. Those who have experienced it will know that this is true; and if they wish to analyze the elements of the satisfaction to be derived from this cause, they will find it in the fact that the affection of a dog is so generous and confiding as regards the person he loves, and so unexact as regards himself. A dog has none of that self-consciousness which our human friend invariably has, more or less, and to which we are obliged to minister, while he believes so implicitly in the perfection and goodness of his master or mistress, that we need never fear to be doubted or misunderstood by him.

In the future history of Ernestine and Fury, it will be seen that she at least did well to trust to his almost

human comprehension of her feelings, and sympathy with them. He took up his position now at her feet, as she sat by the window while the shadows of evening deepened round her, preferring the aspect of the sky, dull and lowering as it was, to the flaring of the gas-lights within. There was nothing to be gained by letting her mind rest on the subject uppermost in her thoughts, for she could come to no conclusion respecting the unhappy girl whose despairing look still haunted her, till she had seen her next day, as she hoped to do; and therefore she turned herself resolutely to the contemplation of her own plans of usefulness for the uncertain period which must elapse, before her marriage would bring definite duties and occupations to fill her ardent mind.

Ernestine Courtenay had of late been greatly influenced by one of the most striking characteristics of the age in which we live—the spirit of inquiry now agitating the whole length and breadth of the land as to the real condition of the lower classes, and the responsibility of the upper ranks with regard to them. In a thousand different shapes, in details unnumbered, each one more perplexing than another, has the same great question arisen. The wisest and most learned among us have given it their deepest attention. Many who have greater gifts than wisdom or learning have given their lives to it, and even the worldly and indifferent have it thrust before them whether they will or not; but as yet the result of this living recognition of a mighty universe of suffering and evil lying at our very doors, is the conviction that of all social problems the most perplexing, the most mysterious, and we may say the most awful, is the condition of the poor, who are

never to cease out of the land, and the true nature of their claims upon us; for this is what hitherto the activity and enterprise of the nineteenth century have discovered on the subject, that in this wealthy, enlightened, and Christian country, a portion, fearfully large, of the population are heathens in religion, worn down by the bitter pain of abject want, and brutish from the uncontrolled abandonment of themselves to evil.

We know that round all the luxury, the comfort, and the domestic happiness of our country there is a vast surging mass of suffering and wrong, where the souls and bodies of God's creatures, untaught, unpitied, and unsuccored, are drifting day by day from a life unblest to a death without hope. We know this. We know, moreover, that it is our duty to remedy these startling evils; and, for the most part, there is in the upper ranks a willingness, and even an anxiety, to perform this duty; but how, in the name of all that is practical, how is it to be done? Those who have never tried to learn by their own personal experience how the misery and degradation of the poor is to be relieved, can have no idea of the gigantic difficulties that stand in the way of the plain precepts, to feed the hungry, to instruct the ignorant, to loose the bands of sin and let the oppressed go free.

We hear of men and women dying of starvation on the workhouse steps; of the constant recurrence at Waterloo Bridge of suicides such as that of Lois; of children educated in vice; and we know that for things such as these, we, living among them in social and intellectual luxury, shall surely be brought to judgment by the Father of the poor. Yet when we would seek

to succor or to christianize them, we find ourselves encouraging drunkenness and imposture—idleness, which prefers a trade of lucrative infamy to a life of honest labor,—and that deliberate wickedness which has discovered that certain evil qualities have their market value in this world, and therefore are to be cherished and ripened by every means available. In speaking thus, of course we do but touch, as it were, the outermost edge of that great ocean of darkness and difficulty in which this question is steeped; but these were some of the reflections which passed through the mind of Ernestine Courtenay as she sat gazing out that night upon the dim gray sky. She thought on this subject with perplexity, it is true, and yet with calmness; for there was peace for her in the fixed resolution she had taken, that at least in the narrow circle of her individual existence, not only before her marriage, but always, so far as other claims permitted, she would work out this problem with all the energy, power, and devotion of which her life was capable.

Her life—one little, feeble life, how impotent a gift it seemed wherewith to meet the terrible vastness of the evils which lay even within the sphere of her own vision! Yet it was a life which, like that of every other human being on this earth, had its special mission for the furtherance of God's glory, and if even it accomplished but a small amount of actual good, it yet might clear a little space for the labors of more efficient workers, and sound at least some of the unknown depths of that infinite suffering which was heaving and moaning around her. For Ernestine Courtenay believed in the immortality of the soul, unlike the great majority of those who call themselves by the name of

the religion which is founded on that doctrine; unlike them, for if that wonderful belief had really fallen upon their spirits in the greatness of its glory and calm, they could neither have fretted and pined over the passing troubles of their little day on earth, nor looked with such dismay on the manifold evils in the world. To believe in the soul's immortality as Ernestine did, is to know that for the whole mass of this earth's misery there is an infinite compensation, a perfect solution, in that grand eternal Love into which all of the human race who seek it shall be drawn up to find, in perfect union with the will of God, for the past as well as the present, a thankful acceptance of that which in the darkness of earth's night seemed to be evil, but in the pure light of the unending day shines forth as heavenly good.

This was her faith, and therefore it was that, with a quiet resolution of enduring constancy, she prepared to give herself, so far as she might, to advance, were it but a hair's breadth, that glorious consummation. As yet she did not see one step before her as to the means by which she was to carry out this resolution; not because there was any lack of opportunities, but because the field was so vast, the evils so manifold, the channels of usefulness for her and for all so numerous and so urgent, that she believed to each one on earth must be given some special work to do on behalf of their fellow-creatures, if only they have the heart to undertake it; and believing this, she did not doubt that her own portion of the universal labor would be made known to her when a fit time came. She knew who had said, "He that followeth ME shall not walk in darkness;" and she felt that amid all the dimness and perplexity of

the world in which He went about doing good, the trace of His steps shines forth ever as a luminous path, whereon the feet of all may safely tread who follow Him in sincerity and truth.

And while Ernestine sat there thinking thus, the darkness deepened round her, even as the night which never was to lighten into day was deepening in the soul of her who was keeping her death vigil on the lonely rock by the cold sea-shore; and Ernestine little dreamt that, in the silent tragedy which was being enacted there beneath the eyes of God alone, she was to find the token her faith so wisely sought to show her the work appointed to her on earth for the glory of God and the good of His suffering creatures.

Ernestine's first thought next morning was for the poor girl of whom she hoped to hear some tidings; and when her early breakfast was over, she sat waiting anxiously for the arrival of the policeman, who had promised to come as soon as possible to tell her the result of his search. Hour after hour passed away, however, without his appearance, and Ernestine began to grow very impatient. She did not wish to remain in Seamouth longer than she could help, and the idea that he might after all fail in obtaining any trace of the unhappy girl gave her more pain than she could well account for. She waited some time without making any inquiry, for the dread that her brother might indeed be only too deeply implicated in the matter, made her shrink from mentioning the subject; but at last, as the day wore on, she could no longer delay, and having sent for her servant, she told him to go and find the policeman she had seen the day before, as she wished to speak to him. The man looked perplexed, and at

last said, with some hesitation, that the policeman had been there already.

"And why was I not told?" exclaimed Ernestine, much vexed. The servant shifted uneasily from one foot to the other.

"The policeman found Fenton still here," he said, "and he took him out with him."

Fenton was Colonel Courtenay's confidential servant, whom he had left behind.

"What had he to do with Fenton?" said Ernestine, coloring; "you knew that I had told him to come and speak to myself this morning."

"He found that Fenton could give him some information he required."

Ernestine turned away to hide her burning cheeks. "The man has made a great mistake," she said; "I wished him simply to ascertain where that young woman had gone. You will go, if you please, and call Fenton back, there is no occasion for his interference; and tell the policeman to come to me."

"He said he would return in the evening, ma'am; but I think I ought to let you know there has been an accident."

"An accident! What do you mean?"

"That young girl, ma'am—it is no use looking after her any more, she was found this morning, drowned!"

Ernestine started to her feet and stood transfixed; the pallid face of the girl as she had last seen her, with her despairing look fixed on George Courtenay, rose up before her, and a horror beyond words took possession of her as to the manner of her death; but the man had said an accident. Oh that it might, indeed, be only an accident which had quenched that forlorn life! She

clasped her hands tightly together that her agitation might not appear, and said, "How did it happen? Is it known how she was drowned?—quick—tell me!"

"There is no doubt, ma'am, that she made away with herself. Two men in a fishing boat saw her throw herself into the water, and they went to her as quick as they could, but before they could get her out she was quite dead."

Ernestine buried her face in her hands with almost a groan of anguish. The man went on hurriedly, as if there were something which must be said, and the sooner the better.

"The policeman came here, ma'am, to ask you to attend the coroner's inquest on the body; but Fenton told him that he could give more information than you could, and he said the coroner would be glad not to have to ask a lady to attend; but the policeman told me to beg you to be so good as not to leave Seamouth till he had seen you, for there was some kind of a paper addressed to Colonel Courtenay found on the body, and they wished to deliver it to you, as the Colonel has sailed. The policeman said he would come when he was off duty to-night."

"That will do," said Ernestine in a low voice; "I will see the man when he comes;" and the servant left the room. Then, when she saw that she was alone, she flung herself upon her knees, and sent as it were her whole soul to heaven in the one imploring cry: "My God, forgive, forgive him;" but the very words which thus came spontaneously to her lips brought with them a revulsion of feeling. "Why should I judge him?" she exclaimed, starting to her feet; "my poor brother, he may be wholly guiltless of this dreadful death; he

may have erred through thoughtlessness, or even through compassion for the lost. I have heard of such things; at least I will wait till I know the whole truth." And unable to endure the restlessness of suspense, and the dull aching at her heart which showed that she strove in vain to deceive herself, she walked to and fro through the miserable hours of that long afternoon, seeking vainly to lose, were it but for a moment, the consciousness of the terrible certainty from which there was no escape, that the unhappy girl she had seen the day before living, breathing, suffering, now lay cold and rigid in the irrevocable silence of that death which to her had been no heaven-sent rest, but a self-wrought crime; and why—why had she died? This was the fearful question that racked poor Ernestine through that dark troubled day.

At a late hour she was disturbed by the entrance of a waiter with the evening paper, which he laid on the table before her. "Latest edition, ma'am, just out; thought you might like to see it;" and having lighted the gas he left the room.

Ernestine continued to walk to and fro restlessly, taking no notice of the newspaper, till, as she passed the table, her eye accidentally caught the heading of a column in the "Latest Intelligence," "Inquest on the body of a young woman found drowned this morning."

She had not thought of this, and a sickening dread as to what she might learn came over her as she seized the paper in her trembling hands and sat down to read it.

The account of the inquest and the depositions of the witnesses were given at length; for such events were much less common in Seamount than they would have been in London.

First there was the testimony of the two men who had witnessed the suicide. They described how they had been out all night with their nets, and were coming slowly homeward as the dawn approached, when suddenly they saw the figure of a woman standing on a rock; one moment only they saw her stand, and then with a cry, whose mournful echo reached them even where they were, they saw her fling herself with one bound into the sea. She sank, then rose for a moment, and sank again. They rowed with all possible speed to the place, which they had carefully noted, and found the water sufficiently shallow to give them a chance of reaching the body with their boat-hook. Nearly half an hour elapsed, however, before they succeeded in finding it, and when they were at last enabled to bring her on shore, they were convinced that she must be quite dead. Nevertheless they carried her to the nearest house, a fisherman's cottage, and one of the men went at once for the doctor.

The doctor's evidence was then given very briefly, to the effect that he had endeavored for upward of an hour to restore animation, without success, and that he had no doubt the young woman had been dead some time before he saw her. On examining the body, he had found a pocket-book within her dress, which had been placed in the hands of the coroner.

The coroner here stated that the pocket-book contained only a letter addressed to Colonel Courtenay, of the —th Regiment, which he would lay before the jury when the witnesses had been examined.

Policeman X next stated that he had been requested the day before, by Miss Courtenay, to find out the abode of a girl she had seen on board the "Hero;" that he

had traced the individual in question to a lodging-house which he had reached in the evening, and found from the woman who kept it that she had just gone out. He had followed in the direction she had taken, and he found that the last person who had seen her was an old man, to whom she had given money; and he then lost all trace of her, till hearing in the morning of the suicide, he suspected it might be the same person, and took the lodging-house keeper to see her, who at once identified the body.

This woman now appeared, and said that the girl had been for two days at her house. She had seemed very energetic and animated when she first came, and stated that she was going to India in the "Hero." At first she had said she was going with the soldiers' wives, but on returning from the emigrant depot announced that she had changed her plans. The next day she had been out all morning, the woman did not know where, but after the "Hero" had sailed she came back so altered that she seemed no longer like the same person. She had sat down in a corner with her face buried in her hands till evening, then she rose, paid what she owed without speaking a word, and went out. The woman never saw her again till the policeman took her to look at her dead body.

An old man then described his meeting with her near the beach; her giving him a purse containing money, and her coming back to ask him to pray God to bless her.

Fenton, Colonel Courtenay's servant, was then called to state what he knew of the deceased. His evidence was given in such a manner as to display the peculiar characteristics of that phase of human nature which

develops itself in the fashionable servant of a fashionable man. It was very evident that Mr. Fenton found the public revelation he was called upon to make, a favorable opportunity for paying off his late master for the various occasions in which his selfishness had interfered with his servant's pleasures or vices—the terms being in this case synonymous.

He deposed that he knew the deceased very well. Her name was Lois Brook. She was the daughter of the gate-keeper at Carleton Hall. Colonel Courtenay had seen her there. She was a fine-looking girl then, and he had taken her away with him, as gentlemen will. He kept her three months at Richmond, longer than Fenton had ever known the Colonel keep a girl. By that time he was courting Miss Julia Talbot, his present wife, so he sent Lois Brook to a gay house, and never troubled his head about her again; but the girl was wild about the Colonel, and was fool enough to fancy he would come to see her. Fenton had no doubt, from what he had heard, that she was determined, by hook or by crook, to go to India with him. He had been on board the "Hero" the day before, when she was found in the hold. He heard her begging the Colonel to take her to India with him. The Colonel swore at her, he believed. Anyhow, he settled her somehow; and Fenton would really have been sorry for the girl, if he had not been so used to that sort of thing in Colonel Courtenay's service. He saw the girl taken ashore, and he was not surprised to find that she had made away with herself. The Colonel could make himself very pleasant to those who only saw him occasionally, and Fenton knew he had promised the girl half a hundred times he would never forsake her; and he had

often heard her tell him she would die if he did, so she kept her word to him sure enough; but, bless you! the Colonel would not have cared if she had made a hole in the water before his very eyes.

Here Fenton's evidence terminated, and the letter poor Lois wrote in her death agony was handed round by the jury. It was given entire in the paper, and Ernestine read it word for word. Finally the jury consulted, and gave in their verdict, the usual conventionalism,—“That the deceased destroyed herself in a fit of temporary insanity;” a sentence which they recorded with as much pomposity as if it had been a striking novelty. Just as they were about to separate, however, a juror started up, a butcher, as it happened, by trade, but an honest, true-hearted man by right of nature, and demanded that a resolution should be passed, expressive of the jury's extreme disapproval of Colonel Courtenay's conduct to the unfortunate girl. The coroner, a man of higher “cultivation” than the sensitive butcher, was quite shocked at such an unheard-of proposal. Most unbecoming, most improper. They were not there to try Colonel Courtenay, a gentleman of position and high family; a very distinguished officer, the coroner believed, decorated by her Majesty. Of course gentlemen would indulge their little fancies, but it was highly creditable to Colonel Courtenay that he had dismissed this young woman before his marriage. The coroner had no doubt the gallant gentleman would have amply provided for her, if she had not placed herself out of his reach in this very culpable manner. The coroner trusted he should never again have to comment upon such an improper proposal from a juror.

With this the inquest terminated. Ernestine Cour-

tenay let the paper fall from her grasp, and sat with her hands clasped on her knees, and her eyes wide open, gazing into vacancy, while a sensation of horror and dismay chilled her to the heart. Gradually, as she sat there, an expression of grave determination, such as never before had settled over that fair sweet face, grew dark and rigid upon it. There are moments in this life which come to us with such tremendous power, that they can actually petrify, as it were, the subtle human spirit into one peculiar mould, in which it remains fixed and unchanged for life. Such a moment there was for Ernestine when she learnt the truth of her brother's guilt and his victim's death, and her soul was sealed in that hour with an impress which it would carry with it into eternity.

She had, however, little time for reflection; the policeman was ushered in, and she turned round calm, though deadly pale, to meet him. He brought the pocket-book containing the letter to Colonel Courtenay, and said he was desired by the coroner to place it in her hands. She shivered as she took it, discolored by the water which had blotted out a human life. The policeman was about to enlarge on the inquest, but she stopped him hastily.

"I have seen the newspaper; I know it all; but I wish to ask you one question, Where is the body?"

"It is still at the fisherman's cottage, ma'am; but it will be removed to the workhouse to-night, and buried to-morrow by the parish authorities. If they had brought in *felo de se*, you know, ma'am, it could not have been—"

"I know, I know," exclaimed Ernestine, hastily interrupting him; "but can you tell me if there would

be any objection to my undertaking the funeral expenses?"

"Well, ma'am, I should say not, by no means; they would be glad enough to save their pockets, I make no doubt."

"But in that case, could the body be allowed to remain where it is till proper arrangements could be made? I should not like it to be moved."

"That depends on the fisherman and his wife; if they don't object, no one else would; and if you were to make it worth their while, I should think you might do as you pleased. They seem poor folk enough."

"It must be settled now though. I suppose orders were given to remove the body to-night?"

"Yes, the workhouse cart was to be sent for it; but I can stop that, if you wish me to tell the master of the workhouse that you will bear all expenses."

"I should be obliged to you to do so."

"And some one must go to the fisherman," continued the policeman. "I should not have time myself."

"I will settle that, if you will tell me precisely where the cottage is."

"It is easily found; it is the first cottage you come to on the beach after you leave the town. Hill is the fisherman's name; any one could show it."

"That will be sufficient." She dismissed him; and then went to the window and looked out. The twilight was deepening, but it was not yet quite dark, and in another moment Ernestine, with her face veiled, and her cloak wrapped round her, was taking her way in the direction the policeman had indicated.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PROMISE TO THE DEAD.

AND again the long low beach lay dim in the twilight, and the rising wind swept in fitful gusts across it, and all things were as they had been the night before when Lois Brook still held the awful gift of life within her power—the seed of immortality which she had madly flung upon the barren waste of waters, when even then it might have ripened under the gracious dews of heaven-sent penitence to bear rich fruit in the eternal harvest, and be forever stored in the garner-house of God.

And now, as then, a woman walked with sorrow-laden steps along the sands; for the horror Ernestine felt for her brother's sin produced an anguish as near akin to remorse as one actually innocent could feel.

A low-roofed cottage, with nets spread out to dry, appeared in the shadows before her, a light twinkling in one window, the other looking black in the white wall. Ernestine knocked softly at the door; a rough-looking woman opened it, and seeing a lady, drew back and asked her to walk in. She entered a little kitchen, scantily furnished, with a few cinders burning on the hearth, over which a man was crouching, spreading out his hands to catch the faint heat. A little girl sat on the ground near him, and two younger children were asleep on a wretched bed spread on the floor. On the

table some empty cups and plates revealed that a meal of some sort had taken place, of which not a vestige remained.

The woman wiped a chair with her apron, and asked Ernestine to sit down, with much more civility than might have been expected from her appearance. But among our English poor, the one idea which presents itself to their mind when they are brought in contact with a person above them in station, is that of gain, for which purpose they are ready with all possible servility; and this is the case even with those who are not in needy circumstances. It is a disagreeable fact, but a true one; and in this book the truth must be told about the poor, instead of their being represented in ideal colors, as they generally are in novels and religious works of fiction. The fisherman merely looked round and touched an imaginary cap upon his head without speaking. Ernestine sat down, begging the woman to do the same, and then remained for a moment silent, during which time the man and his wife speculated as to the purpose of the lady's visit, and the woman resolved that, whatever it might be, she and her children should be the better of it. At last Ernestine spoke :

"It was to your house, was it not, that the body of the poor young girl was brought?"

The woman took her cue at once.

"That it was, and pretty sight of trouble it has cost us all, and not a penny have we had give us to help us through with it. Why, it has put the place all of a muddle. I never was so upset in my life."

Ernestine looked at her in amazement. Heart-sick as she was herself with the unavailing pity that oppressed her, it seemed to her marvelous that any one should

connect the presence of that forlorn corpse with thoughts of self and of petty discomfort.

"Well, ma'am," said the woman, answering her look, "just look at them children turned out of their beds and left to sleep on a bit of a quilt, all along of that corpse. I could not get them to sleep in the room with it not nohow. Me and my husband we made shift to stop beside her, for we have not another hole to put ourselves in but they two rooms."

"I am very sorry you have been inconvenienced," said Ernestine, fearing it would be quite in vain to ask them to keep their silent guest.

"Ah, little them crowners and juries cared for our convenience. They crowded into this room, if you'll believe me, ma'am, till there was not a corner left for me to stand in. They just gives a look at the corpse, then off they goes to the public-house to sit upon it comfortable, and never so much as offers us a farthing for our trouble; not but what I told them as me and my husband we works hard for our living, and I've lost a day's work by it, and mayhap two."

"Then I am afraid," said Ernestine, "you could not be induced to let the body remain here another night. I would willingly pay you well," she added hastily, seeking to anticipate a refusal, which the woman had not the least intention of giving.

"Well, ma'am, I don't know but what I would be willing to do a kind action by the poor thing. It will be a world of trouble, to be sure, but I has a feeling heart, ma'am, and it 'ud hurt me to see her took off by the workus cart. One of the children's ailing, sure enough, and it is a sin and a shame to keep him out of his own bed; still I'd wish to do as I'd be

done by. I'll keep her, if you asks me, only it'll need a good bit of money to make up for all as it costises us one way or another."

"Will this be sufficient?" said Ernestine, putting into her hand a sum of money, so far beyond what the woman expected, that she at once began to exclaim that she would keep the body in the house, three or four nights if the lady wished it; but Ernestine, little as she knew of the poor, could not be blind to the woman's selfishness, and answered quietly that one night was all she asked, the body would be buried next day.

"Did you know this poor wench, ma'am?" said the fisherman, for the first time looking round—the financial department being evidently entirely in the hands of his strong-minded wife.

"I only saw her once," said Ernestine, her voice trembling, "but I know her history, and I wish to do what I can for her still."

"Ah, friend and foe is all alike to her now!" said the man, shaking his head. "Poor wench! poor wench!"

"My husband 'tended the 'quest to-day, and he's quite upset by it; he's been a-moaning and groaning over the girl ever since; but I tells him he has no call to trouble hisself for such a one as she were."

"And I say," said the man, suddenly striking the table with his clinched fist, "that that 'ere fine gentleman as took her out of her father's house and ruined her, and then broke her heart, and let her go and drowneded herself, is as big a scoundrel as walks the earth, and I'd tell him so to his face if I seed him here now."

Ernestine sat motionless for a moment, and then said, in her low sweet voice:

"You are quite right, he is most guilty; but are there any on earth so much to be pitied as the wicked? Should we not pray for him, that he may repent of his deadly sin?"

"Pray for him! If ever any rascal were to serve my Katie here as he has served that poor dead corpse, I'd have the life out of him once for all, though I had to swing for it the same day;" and he drew his little daughter to his side with an impassionate violence.

Ernestine hid her face in her hands without speaking.

"Law! John, you frightens the lady with your tantrums; ha'done, I tell you. Would you like to see the corpse, ma'am?" she added, as if offering a soothing palliative.

"Yes," said Ernestine, rising, "I do wish to see it; but if you have no objection, I should prefer to go in alone."

"Just as you please, ma'am; I've no objections, if you are not scared; and she's a very pleasant corpse, I must say that." She gave Ernestine the rushlight which burned on the table, opened the door of the room, then closed it after her, and George Courtenay's sister stood alone in the presence of his victim.

In one corner of the room stood a bed, in the other a board placed on two chairs, on which lay the body of Lois Brook. A sheet was spread over it, on which the dim light cast shadows that made it seem to move as Ernestine came near. She could have fancied that the dead corpse writhed beneath its covering when she approached; and in spite of herself, she shook from head to foot as she placed the candle on the table and uncovered the face. Then, as she gazed on it, she ceased to tremble; for when she had last looked upon that

countenance it had been terrible from the bitter anguish with which it had been convulsed; and now, wheresoever the soul of Lois Brook might be, at least the stamp of agony had passed from her dead face—cold, white; and rigid it was, but fixed into such stillness as no living heart could ever dream of. Not only were the despairing eyes which had haunted Ernestine now closed as in gentle sleep, and the mute lips sealed forever from whence that dreadful shriek had rung, but there had passed over the countenance that peculiar change which is often seen, even in cases where death has taken place at an advanced age, when the features seem to return to the mould in which they were first cast, and grow childlike again, as if the cold hand of death had wiped out all trace of the life they have passed through, and smoothed away the furrows left by this world's care and suffering.

In the present instance, it seemed as if it were actually the face of a child that shone out so white from the dark masses of hair that hung around it; and as Ernestine bent sorrowfully over it, these touching words came vividly to her mind :

“Weep not for the dead, neither bemoan them, for they are at rest; but weep sore for him that goeth away, for he shall return no more, nor see his native country.”

She knew that, according to the spiritual interpretation of an old writer, he that went away, went from holiness and innocence to serve the world, the flesh, and the devil, never more to return to God, or see in heaven the native land of His elect. Well might the case apply to Lois and George Courtenay. The girl had fearfully erred, but she had been the tempted, not the

tempter; and as for the deed that destroyed her life, she might well be supposed to ignore, with the majority of the poor, that it was a crime. For her, at least, it might be that there remained a refuge in the Infinite compassion, which still, through the long vista of centuries, echoes in our ears those tenderest words: "Neither do I condemn thee." But for him, the educated gentleman, the clever, clear-sighted man of the day, what excuse could be found in heaven or in earth? The tempter, the betrayer, with deliberate forethought, and now the murderer—who shall remove the blood-guilt from his head? For a passing self-indulgence he had trampled under foot the innocence, the happiness, the life of one of God's creatures, and steeped in deadly sin a soul that could never cease to live through all eternity; and where could the annals of crime record a blacker deed than this?

Ernestine was aware that in giving this judgment out of the determined truth of her nature, she was reversing the sentence of the world in such matters; but not the less she felt in the depths of her true spiritual instinct that it was thus the comparative guilt in such cases was balanced before the righteous God of all. And she was right. In vain will be all efforts to stem the "social evil" in this land, so long as this, the most odious of the world's hypocrisies, is allowed to hold the place of justice and equity with regard to it. It is a marvel which can only be accounted for by the power of self-deception, inherent in human nature, that any who profess the principles of truth and honor, much less of religion, should dare truckle to so mean a sham as that which pretends to uphold the interests of morality by trampling under foot the fallen woman, and

holding out the right hand of fellowship to the man who dragged her into sin and shared it with her.

No amount of contumely, of degradation, and of abhorrence can be too much for the weak, ignorant girl who has listened to the voice of the tempter and believed his lies ; but as for the experienced man, with every advantage of position and education, who knowingly, willfully, has chosen vice for his pleasure, and the ruin of an imperishable soul for his amusement, by all means let him be received by the most immaculate society, and honored with all such homage as his worldly advantages command. He might be appointed inspector of the public morals, if such a post happened to exist in England ; for on him there is no disgrace, no stain. That which, in the feeble and thoughtless is a crime, to be punished with a severity from which there is no escape but in death, is in the strong and experienced but a natural weakness, bearing round it, in the eyes of younger men, a certain *prestige* of manliness which attracts their imitation. Nor is the world ashamed of its code of morality. No one ever questions the social law which protects the sin in the one case, and hunts it down in the other. The public journals lately gave a notable instance of effrontery in this respect.

At a recent trial, which involved a question as to a young man's moral conduct, his counsel openly announced his belief that there was not a statesman, or a bishop, or a judge on the bench, who had not committed similar "follies" in his youth ; and if there were one, he added, he should think the worse of him for it !

Who cares what dead men's bones fill the whited sepulcher, if only it is garnished with the appliances of

wealth and station ! Let the pale wasted girl be driven from your door ; suffer her not to contaminate with her presence so much as the pavement under your foot ; but take my Lord, her betrayer, by the hand, and seat him at your table, heap honors and friendship upon him, and give an indulgent smile to the rumor of his deeds of darkness.

So judges the world in its well varnished complacency ; so does not the Most High God judge in the clear light of His perfect justice.

But Ernestine Courtenay had not come there simply to look on her brother's victim from curiosity. She had come to renew, in presence of that mute witness, the resolution she had taken as she sat for the first few moments motionless, with the record of her brother's guilt lying at her feet. The knowledge of his crime had entered into her soul with an anguish only less bitter to her than the unavailing pity with which she thought of the lost girl, dead by her own hand. Yet for neither of them could she do aught now ; both were beyond her reach : the one in his independence, his luxury, his determined freedom of will, to make his whole life black with sin, if he chose it ; the other in the stern coldness of that inanimation over which the words " Too late, too late," could alone be spoken.

Still there was one way in which it seemed to her she might even yet serve both. She might try to save that other lost one, the guilt of whose ruin lay on both their heads alike. The dying appeal of Lois Brook on behalf of her sister Annie must not fall to the ground unheeded ; and Ernestine had learnt in that day's revelation to know her brother too well to hope that he would ever respond to the last prayer of his unhappy

victim. The man who could deal with such selfish cruelty by the soul which he himself had ruined, was little likely to give a single moment from his luxurious ease to seek the deliverance of one who was only the victim of his friend.

But Ernestine could feel that in this she was surely appointed to be the representative of her brother. To her had been brought that letter, with its half-obliterated words; and to her heart, heavy with the weight of that dreadful suicide, had come the piteous cry of the dying girl, when, in the last agony of life, she had called upon her Father in heaven, and upon her best beloved on earth, to save her sister Annie. God—how far more merciful than man—had heard the prayer, and sent to the rescue a brave true-hearted messenger, who had resolved that she would never cease her efforts to seek and save that one lost child.

And now, as Ernestine stood and looked upon the marble face which she had seen but once living, and once dead, and which she never more would see till, at the voice of the archangel, she should rise and behold life quivering through those fixed lineaments, and Lois standing by George Courtenay's side, to hear their sentence from the lips of the One All Pure,—as she looked on the cold corpse and thought upon these things her heart burned within her, and she felt that life itself were cheaply given, and with life all she might have to sacrifice, in the search on which she was about to enter, if only in that tremendous hour she might bring this one soul, rescued from the enemy and the avenger, to the dear feet of Him whose infinite compassion flowed forth in His very heart's blood for the wandering and the lost.

Yes, all that she must sacrifice. Ernestine did not deceive herself; she knew that for a young lady of her rank in life to go out alone into the very haunts of sin to seek one of the fallen and degraded of her own sex, would be considered a very reprehensible departure from the usages of the society in which she had always lived. She must break down the barriers that hedged her in from so much as a knowledge of the existence of the deadly vice with which she had now to grapple face to face. She must overcome the shrinking horror which she felt for even the slightest contact with this hateful evil. She must lay aside the natural reserve which on such a subject sealed not only her lips, but her inmost thoughts. To do all this would be a sore trial for a pure-minded Englishwoman; and yet, for that very self-sacrifice, she knew she would meet with unmitigated censure from all her acquaintances. She would be told that her conduct was improper, unbecoming in a lady, and incompatible with womanly delicacy. She would hear that it was contamination to breathe the same air with the degraded and the lost; that the scenes she would witness, the words she would hear, would seem to herself so corrupting, that she would feel unable to pass from that atmosphere of vice to the polished society where sin is ignored, and men and women, by common consent, agree to hold each other immaculate. To all this Ernestine had an answer ready in her heart from the memory of these words: "They shall walk with Him in white." If with Him who passed unscathed and spotless through this world she walked amid the scenes of infamy where undefiled charity might lead her, she knew that she might keep the garments of her soul as white and stainless as the

mountain snow; and the presence of the deadliest evils that ever cursed the earth would be to her as harmless as the hot breath of that fiery furnace in which the three children walked unhurt, because of One who was with them in the fire.

"If they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them." This promise, made to those who first carried the Gospel of Peace to the people who sat in darkness and the shadow of death, would not fail her who was about to carry the Evangel of Mercy to the fallen, and she would be as safe from harm by touch of evil as they were from the poisoned cup or venomous snake.

"Oh, who could live to seek their own happiness alone!" said Ernestine, as she laid her hand on the cold forehead of the dead girl, "while sights like these are common on the earth, and each day adds to the wreck of souls that have gone to their destruction, without a hand stretched out to save them. Lois, I go to seek your sister Annie, and I will never rest, or cease to labor with my whole life's strength, if need be, till I have found her, and can hope to yield her up to you, at our next awful meeting, a penitent and pardoned soul; and you, Lois, forgive, forgive my cruel brother."

She stooped down as she spoke and kissed the cold white face, then reverently covered it, and with a few words of thanks to the fisherman and his wife, went out once more into the dark silent night.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LAST RESTING-PLACE.

THE very first step which Ernestine felt she must take in her self-imposed mission for the rescue of Annie Brook, was one which jarred upon her natural sensitiveness to the utmost degree. She knew of but one means of obtaining immediate information concerning her, and that was through her brother's servant, Fenton. She was aware that he must leave Seamouth next morning, therefore her first act on returning from the fisherman's cottage was to send for this man, whose true character she instinctively understood, in order to speak to him on the very last subject she would ever have wished to mention to him.

Most thoroughly astonished assuredly was Fenton, when, having appeared in the lady's presence, he found himself called upon to state what he knew of Lois Brook's sister. How it came to pass that the refined, gentle Miss Courtenay touched on such a subject was a mystery to him; but he could not, if he would, have avoided her calm, grave questions. He told her all he knew; how he had seen Annie Brook, a girl of seventeen, at Colonel Courtenay's villa at Richmond for one day only, and how he had himself helped her into the phaeton when she left it with a friend of the Colonel's.

"Who was this man?" asked Ernestine.

Fenton looked for one moment at the clear eyes that

were turned anxiously toward him, and answered shortly, "Mr. Brown, ma'am."

"Mr. Brown!" repeated Ernestine, thoughtfully. She could not recollect ever having heard George speak of a friend of that name; but he might have many friends she knew nothing about, especially such as were beneath his own rank in society, as she inferred from the name this Brown probably was. It was rather a relief to her to conclude that such was the case. If in her search for Annie, she were forced, even in the remotest degree, to come in contact with this man, it would at least be a comfort to know she would not risk meeting him again afterward in her ordinary routine of life.

"Do you know where the girl went to?" she continued, forcing herself to conclude the task of questioning the servant, which became each moment more repugnant to her.

"Not at first," he replied; "but I know that afterward she was at Greyburgh, for the Colonel's girl, Lois, sent a box to her which had been left behind."

"Do you suppose she is still there?"

"I cannot say, ma'am. I know Mr. Brown is not, for I saw him in London not long since; but it is very likely the girl is. Greyburgh is just the place for such as—"

"That will do," interrupted Ernestine, in a manner which made Fenton close his lips suddenly and turn to the door. "Of course you know Mr. Brown's address," said Ernestine, hastily, as he was going out.

"I do not, ma'am," he answered, with sudden energy; "I have not the least idea where Mr. Brown is to be found."

"Very well, you can go;" and, as he finally vanished, Ernestine threw herself into a seat and hid her face in her hands.

"It is sickening," she murmured to herself; "but, oh! if I can but save that one immortal life, what will it all signify! if I can only bring one ransomed soul to plead for George at the bar of judgment, because for his sake she was sought and found. No—nothing I may have to bear shall stop me; I will find her, so help me God, though I have to spend my life in the search."

Then she proceeded quietly to mature her plans on the information she had received. She was very glad to find that Greyburgh was the place to which in all probability she would have to go in pursuit of Annie; for her brother Reginald was at college there, and she had already been intending to go and see him, as there had been a tone of hopeless despondency in his letters for some time past which had filled her with anxiety. His health had been delicate ever since the severe illness through which she had nursed him, and it was plain that he was far from well, although it was chiefly the evidence of mental pain and unrest which had alarmed her. Ernestine could not help hoping, however, that Annie Brook might be found before she went to Greyburgh. If the man who had stolen her from her God and her home were no longer there, it seemed improbable that she would remain. Surely, in the misery of her desertion, she would fly back to the friends of her childhood, and at once be found under the shelter of her father's roof; but Ernestine little knew what temptations surround such helpless children as the girl she sought to save, and that Matthew Brook's cottage was the last place where she should expect to find her.

There she resolved to go first of all, trusting that if she did not actually meet her, she should at least hear where she might be found. Before she took even this step, however, in the task which lay before her, there were certain formidable preliminaries to be gone through.

Ernestine knew, as we have said, that she could not commence a search for one whose very existence would be ignored in the society she frequented, without departing very far from the conventionalities of a well-born lady's ordinary routine of life; and to do so even in the smallest degree would be to commit a heinous offense in the eyes of Lady Beaufort,—the aunt with whom she had lived previous to Colonel Courtenay's return from India. But Ernestine was five and twenty, and at that age she did not hold herself bound to her aunt's views, if even five and twenty years out of one short life were not enough to have sacrificed to the stereotyped uselessness of a fashionable young lady's career. The tremendous realities of life and death, of sin and of judgment, which had been brought so vividly before her in the last few days, had given form and distinctness to many misgivings on those points which had been vaguely stirring in her mind for some time past. She was anxious, however, to do what she could to conciliate her aunt; and as she knew Lady Beaufort would expect her niece after Colonel Courtenay's departure, she determined to go to her in London for a day or two, and endeavor to allay her virtuous indignation at plans she would consider so eccentric, by assuring her that she meant in all her future wanderings, wherever they might lead her, to be accompanied by her former governess, Mrs. Tompson, whose devoted religion to the proprieties

of life might satisfy possibly even the refined worldliness of Lady Beaufort.

Her aunt, however, was not the only person to be consulted, nor the one whose approbation was the most dear to her. Ernestine knew that she had given Hugh Lingard a full right to take cognizance of all her actions, and she was far too true and loyal to the engagement which bound her to him, to wish to take any step without his sanction; but she had not the slightest fear that he would withhold it. Not only did he love her so well that her lightest fancy was sure to meet with entire and tender indulgence from him, but one of the most striking peculiarities of his character was an unbounded liberality and tolerance for the opinions and feelings of others, however various and contradictory they might be. It was a characteristic which gave a singular charm to this man in all social intercourse; but Ernestine had not as yet thought deeply enough on the mysteries of the hidden and inner human life to perceive from how poisoned a source it sprung.

It had fared with Hugh Lingard as with many thousands of men at the present day, who, like himself, are clever, without being deep thinkers. The misty theological atmosphere of the intellectual society with which his tastes led him to mix, had obscured for him the foundations of the old faith to which in his careless youth he had given a superficial assent; and it suited well with the mental indolence and love of pleasure, which were his greatest failings, to make it his only creed, that it was vain to seek the truth among so many conflicting theories and contradictory opinions, and that there was nothing to be done but to make the best of

life in its visible aspect, and leave the problem of the grave to be solved by that sure death which had alone the key to it. He thought himself sincere in this negative belief, which left him free to make a god of his own unlicensed will; and he would think and talk with a gentle melancholy of those who rested in surer and brighter hopes, and fancied he envied them. But he deceived himself; for the real obstacle to his seeking and finding—as men of purer souls have done in similar circumstances, the sure ground-work of an intelligent faith—was his distaste to the mental labor of extracting the truth from the mass of sophistries in which his false teachers had submerged it, and a still greater unwillingness to give up the pleasant vices which he felt could not coexist with a true religion. For deep in his soul, beneath all his shallow reasonings and many-sided doubts, there was an underlying consciousness of that great principle which has its being in the very nature of the Creator, that by the way of personal holiness all men may arrive at a knowledge of God, and of His truth. “If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.”

Lingard did not find it very difficult to stifle this conviction, however, which only at rare intervals sent up a flash of unwelcome light into his self-chosen darkness, and he compounded with his conscience by an extensive charity to all forms of belief and error alike, and by indulging the natural kindness of his disposition, in the relief of suffering so far as he could, whenever it happened to cross his path. He was not one to glorify himself in his want of definite principle, as men of shallower natures are apt to do; on the contrary, he kept his negation of faith, it could hardly be called

active unbelief, as much as possible in the background, and the same indolence which rendered him unwilling to probe the questions modern skepticism had raised, made him ever seek in his intercourse with others to ignore the subject of religion altogether.

Ernestine had been won by his generous disposition, his abhorrence of everything mean and petty; his sweet temper and kindly impulses, as well as by the brilliant talents which promised one day to bring him both fame and fortune, and she had taken it for granted that these fair qualities sprung from as pure a creed as that which governed her own existence. She had not then thought so deeply on such matters as circumstances were likely now to make her do, and she was content with that half of his life which was displayed before her; the other half, with its deadly vices, its degrading pleasures, its calm selfishness, sacrificing mortal lives and immortal souls at random, for personal gratification, was kept as a spectacle for the eyes of the pure God alone.

Ernestine expected to see Lingard in London, but she felt that she could more easily write than speak on such a subject as that which now engrossed her; and she sat down forthwith to tell him of her future plans. She did not find it very easy to do so, because she could not tell all the circumstances which had led her to her present resolution. Not even to Lingard, her brother's most intimate friend, and her own future husband, could she bear to betray the hidden guilt of George Courtenay, or the fatal result to his helpless victim; but she told Lingard that circumstances of a most painful nature had brought to her knowledge the history of a young girl who had been allured from her

home and her innocence, and now must in all probability be utterly lost, if no friendly hand were stretched out to save her; and further, that one just dead had indirectly, but yet most positively, imposed upon her the mission of seeking out and rescuing this unhappy child from ultimate destruction. She trusted to be able to accomplish her task quickly and easily, without exciting observation; but if it should take the labor of years, and force her to measures that would be thought unbecoming to her station in life, she still must carry it out to the end, though all the world should blame her,—if only he did not withhold his consent, and this she besought him not to do if he valued her peace of mind. There would not be time for him to answer by letter, as she intended to remain only one day more in Seamount, but she trusted she should see him at her aunt's, soon after her arrival there.

To Lady Beaufort she merely wrote that she was coming to town for one day, and reserved all explanations till they met; and this done she turned her thoughts to the arrangements for Lois Brook's funeral, which was to take place the next day. Ernestine was resolved to be present at it herself. It was but a barren act of kindness to show to one who had reason to curse the name she bore; but she could not let her be thrust into her dishonored grave without a human being to stand by in sorrow for the young life quenched in such fatal darkness; and since, by George Courtenay's deed, no kindred of her own could show her that last charity, Ernestine, as his representative, would do all that might yet be done to prove that the guilty suicide had once been loved and honored. The man to whom she

intrusted the arrangements for the burial, told her that it could not take place till the evening of the next day; and it was settled that she was to meet the funeral at the churchyard, where it was to be privately brought from the fisherman's cottage, in order to avoid the crowd who were very likely to assemble, under the circumstances, if the hour of interment were known. A long and dreary night followed for poor Ernestine, and a still more dreary day, till in the lingering twilight of a soft spring evening she made her way to the last resting-place of Lois Brook.

The precautions taken had been quite effectual, and the churchyard was deserted when Ernestine reached it, by all but the sexton, who, having finished his task, was now lazily tolling the bell at long intervals, bent on getting his accustomed fee, even on an occasion so much beneath his notice as the present. There was no other living being among the countless dead, lying all around in their mysterious sleep, excepting two little children, who were playing, on the brink of the open grave, with the falling leaves which the night breeze scattered round them.

Ernestine sat down in the shade of a tree to wait the coming of her who should go forth from those walls no more till the death day of the world itself arrived.

Strange thoughts went surging through her heart as she sat there, thoughts that had never visited her in her existence of calm refinement heretofore. She thought how this young life over which she mourned, this soul, the dread of whose eternal loss burned into her heart with agony, was, after all, but *one*, one of the many thousands who in like manner met with wrong, and

ruin, and everlasting perdition at the hands of their fellow-men, hunted down to the grave, and thence to hell, by those who shared their nature and their capacity for suffering and for joy; and then she thought of the no less countless numbers who sat by in careless ease, and watched this game of life and death as the Romans of old looked on while the gladiators tore each other limb by limb; who, if they did not of deliberate purpose deal guilt or misery on those who crossed their path, yet lifted not a hand to save them from more brutal natures, and indirectly preyed on many by following out their one purpose of personal gratification, heedless how far it were attained at the expense of others. She thought how each of these many thousands had but one life given them for a prey in the midst of this evil and suffering world, one life with all its capacity to bless, to curse, or superciliously to ignore the fellow-creatures, like themselves rushing down the steep of time to the unchangeable eternity.

Surely if they but looked on the awful mass of sin and anguish seething round them, the one life given them to use or waste would seem all too little to spend in lessening, in ever so small a degree, that mountain of evil, still rising higher and higher to fill up the measure of iniquity against the day of vengeance. Would the cry of accusation against those who might have saved and did not, be less piercing or less powerful than that which would denounce the very ministers of sin? Yet how in truth was that one precious life disposed of by the majority of those who deemed themselves righteous, because not actively malevolent in their sphere of influence?

Ernestine lifted her eyes to where the little children

played by the open grave, their merry laughter mingling with the deep tolling of the funeral bell; and it seemed to her that in them she saw the type of those who toyed with life and its passing pleasures on the brink of open graves,—the graves not of mortal ashes but of living souls, buried by cruel hands in a spiritual corruption, from which there may be no resurrection in all eternity; and who could tell but that, unheard by human ears, though echoing mournfully in the courts of heaven, the air was even now full of knells rung out by sorrowing angels for the perishing creatures of the most high God, whose happier children answered the funeral tones with sounds of careless mirth?

Ernestine felt the weight of her own past years of thoughtless ease lie heavy at her heart as she pondered on these things, and she turned with a sense of relief to the thought that she was now about to do her best to rescue one at least of that vast multitude, whose everlasting ruin would be charged on their fellow-men. It was to be with Ernestine, as with all who in any way are roused to definite action with reference solely to the unseen life, the one earnest purpose, the positive recognition of eternal results from temporal deeds; the true unselfish care for an immortal soul was to develop in her own mind truths but dimly apprehended before, to deepen all that was great and noble in her character, and rouse latent powers within her, which would lead her to such a height of self-devoted love to God and man as would have made her shrink and tremble now, could she have seen the full revelation of all that was before her.

But the future was hid, and the present only was there, and that present the darkest moment of her life;

for at the churchyard gate the corpse of her brother's victim was entering slowly, slowly—coming to lie down in the grave his hands had surely dug for her.

The curate, summoned from an adjacent house by the sexton, came hurrying up, fastening his surplice with one hand, while he opened his book with the other. He turned and preceded the coffin, reading the opening sentences of the burial office. The men who bore it followed with careless haste, stumbling over the graves, and jostling their poor helpless burden as they walked. The sexton stood waiting, idly kicking stones into the grave. The little children laughed and shouted as the spectacle for which they had been looking at last drew near; but not all the indifference or irreverence of the human beings round could destroy the wondrous beauty of the glorious hope that, age after age, has blest the world, in these words, "*I am the Resurrection and the Life*,"—words that bind the dying race of man with chains of love to the very Throne of God. They fell on Ernestine's heart that night like fragrant dew on parched and thirsty ground. Yet not without tremor could she hear them; for she knew that to George and to Lois He who spoke them would indeed be the Resurrection, but to which—to either—would He be the Life?

As the coffin was laid by the side of the grave, Ernestine saw that there was one follower at that sad funeral. She could not call him a mourner; for he looked much more as if he would fain have been the avenger; dealing justice on him who had brought the dead to this early doom. It was the fisherman, who stood doggedly at the foot of the grave through the whole service; his hat slouched over his eyes and his

hands clinched. As the sexton flung the earth on the coffin, while the curate gabbled over the solemn formula, "Dust to dust, ashes to ashes," the fisherman suddenly flung out his hand toward the corpse, and exclaimed, with stern vehemence, "And may he who wronged and murdered an innocent girl soon lie rotting in the dust himself." Ernestine half shrieked, and joined her hands in a voiceless prayer that the curse might be averted; the curate frowned; the sexton angrily ordered him to leave the place and not interrupt the service; and the fisherman quietly obeyed. But as he turned to go, he pointed to heaven, and said, "My words 'll come true: the Lord does not sleep when men act like devils."

The last prayers were said; the curate having, to his no small astonishment, recognized a lady in the solitary mourner at a fallen woman's funeral, bowed to her as he turned away. The undertaker's men gathered up their goods and hurried out of the churchyard. The sexton carelessly shoveled in the earth over the coffin, stamped it down with his feet, and having received from Ernestine a gratuity which made him heartily wish such peculiar funerals took place every day, he hastened home to his supper, driving the little children before him. So finished the closing scene on earth. For the last act of the tragedy we must wait till the curtain rises on the one tremendous spectacle which every soul that ever lived shall witness.

Life had been very bright to Ernestine Courtenay hitherto; for it had been full of the sweetest joy this world can give, in the love of him most dear to her on earth. But on this night the weight of its mere responsibility lay upon her heart like lead, as she turned back to the living-world, where in every human soul that

awful struggle was still going on which had terminated in such tremendous loss for the buried corpse at her feet. One last act of duty Ernestine performed before she left. She was anxious that the position of the grave should be recognizable at any future time; for she could not help hoping that a day might come when George Courtenay, sorrow-stricken for the sins of his youth, might learn at that tomb how heavy an accusation was written against him in its mouldering ashes, and make restitution at least in penitence,—since tears of blood, if wept for endless ages, could never give back to the dead the innocence—the life he had destroyed. Ernestine gave orders, therefore, that a simple stone cross should be placed at the head of the grave, with only these words marked on it:

L. B.

Veniam supplicat.

No expression of hope or holy words from the Book of God dared she write over the grave of the suicide; but surely she spoke an awful truth when she said that the ever-living soul, whether hopeful or despairing, implored forgiveness!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OPINION OF THE WORLD.

"**ERNESTINE**, this is too much!" said Lady Beaufort, her lips quivering with indignation, as she flung down the last new book and turned to face her niece. "A certain amount of eccentricity is rather *piquant* than otherwise in these days; it is, at all events, safe, as you are already *fiancée*; but the line you are striking out is perfectly unheard of. Anything which trenches on the *convenances* of society is quite out of the question; you are much mistaken if you think it will succeed."

"Do you mean as regards pleasing the world in general?" said Ernestine, looking up with an amused smile.

"Of course I do," replied Lady Beaufort.

"But that did not enter into my calculations at all," said Ernestine; "I had no intention of taking up any particular line, I assure you. I have but one purpose, which is to save, if I can, this poor lost child."

"Lost child! what absurd sentimentality, to talk in that way. Society would give a very different name to your extraordinary *protégée*."

"It does not much matter what name they would give her," said Ernestine wearily; "she is too surely a perishing soul."

"A soul, indeed! much she cares whether she has a soul or not; and if she has, pray what have you to do

with it? I cannot imagine how you ever heard of such a creature."

"If you knew how I did hear of her, aunt, I am sure you would excuse my determination to do what I can for her."

"I can never excuse your lowering yourself to a pursuit which might perhaps be fitting for the matron of a jail. The daughter of General and Lady Mary Courtenay scouring the country in search of a—! Really, Ernestine, you ought not to force me even to name such a being."

"Then don't let us speak of her any more," said Ernestine.

"Do I understand, then, that you give up this preposterous scheme?"

"I cannot; indeed I cannot; you do not know by what a heavy responsibility I am bound to it," said Ernestine pleadingly. Lady Beaufort started impatiently from her seat, but at this moment the door opened and Hugh Lingard entered the room. She turned to him with an expression of relief.

"I was on the point of sending for you, Mr. Lingard, to see if your greater influence would bring Ernestine to reason. I have failed to shake her obstinacy, but you may succeed better. She tells me she has written her intention to you,—a singular communication certainly for a lady to make to a gentleman," added Lady Beaufort, with a vindictive side glance at her niece, which made poor Ernestine grow crimson to the temples; "but since she has not shrunk from introducing the subject, pray do your best to induce her to abstain from shocking her friends and degrading herself in such an extraordinary manner." And having successfully

fired this last shot, the lady gracefully sailed from the room and disappeared. The first result of her parting speech was that Ernestine, having impulsively held out her hands to Lingard, hid her face on his arm as he sat down beside her, and burst into tears.

"What, Ernie darling," he said, "has a trial at single combat with Lady Beaufort proved too much for you? Well, I am not surprised; I should decline the encounter myself."

"It was a combination of painful feelings overcame me for a moment; but I am very glad you came in, Hugh."

"So am I; only you must not wish me away again, if I tell you that I think Lady Beaufort has reason on her side notwithstanding. This Quixotic scheme is really not a fitting thing for you, Ernestine; I came fully resolved to tell you so."

Ernestine started up, and dashed the tears from her eyes. "Oh, Hugh, don't say so," she exclaimed, her grasp tightening on his hand with convulsive energy; "you can never know how much is bound up for me in this matter, or what a terrible necessity is laid upon me to rescue this girl. She must be saved—she must!"

"Let her be saved, by all means, if she desires it, which is probably doubtful," said Lingard; "but why should you have anything to do with such a one as she is? Send a policeman after her, or a grim old matron out of a refuge; only don't you mix yourself up with an affair of this kind."

"Hugh," said Ernestine, lifting her clear, earnest eyes to his face, "it is I who have been commissioned to do it; commissioned by one now lying cold in her grave; destroyed by her own hand, because none ever

sought to save her, as she bids me save this child. I will tell you this much, and I know you will not ask me more: he, through whose means destruction and misery has come upon the girl I seek, is very near and dear to me. He can do nothing now to check the results of his evil deeds spreading far and wide, where he little dreamt they would extend; and on me it has fallen, by a solemn retribution, to represent him in the effort to make what little atonement may yet be possible for all the ruin and wretchedness he has caused." Her voice became choked with sobs as the cold, white face of the drowned girl seemed to pass before her, and she remembered how, in the very death agony, Lois's one prayer had been, that George Courtenay would save her sister. Struggling to regain composure she went on: "I think, perhaps, you imagine I am going to act in a much more unusual manner than I really am. I will tell you just what I mean to do; I am going into the country to see the girl's father first, and if I do not find her with him, which is possible, I have reason to think she may be at Greyburgh. Now, you know, I had been intending to go there to see Reginald at all events, so there will be nothing strange in my doing so, although, when there, I shall do my very utmost to find this unhappy child."

When Ernestine had said this much, Lingard imagined that he understood the whole story. One "near and dear to her" could only, he felt sure, be one of her brothers. Reginald was at Greyburgh, and it was there she was going to look for the girl, therefore there was no question that it was to him she alluded. Lingard knew that he was very ill, and that he was of a sensitive, gentle disposition, so that it was very likely some

sudden remorse had seized him, which was reacting upon his equally sensitive sister. The suicide of which she spoke was no doubt that of some companion of Reginald's *protégée*, which had deepened the impression on both their minds. It seemed all very clear to him, and having settled the facts to his own satisfaction, he proceeded to deal with them after the fashion of the society which was his world.

"Ernestine," he said, "I can quite understand how all this appears to you ; but your ideas are far too high-flown and ecstatic for this practical world. Such cases are more common than you think, and no one but yourself would imagine that the circumstances laid any responsibility on you. If every one whose friends were implicated in an affair of this kind considered it their duty to act as you propose, there would be occupation of a curious description for very many persons as little suited to it as you are. There is a substratum of this sort of thing underlying society everywhere, and it is only because this case has chanced to crop up to the surface that you give it such undue importance. You must consider, my darling, that this girl is, in the first place, probably quite satisfied with her mode of life, and unwilling to leave it ; and that even if she were not, she is but one of many thousands in exactly the same position. You are not going to carry a crusade through the whole of them, and why should you compromise yourself for one only, out of a tribe better ignored altogether ?"

"One only," said Ernestine, a light as from a purer world shining in her eyes as she spoke ; "but that one an immortal soul that never in all the eternal ages can cease to live, and, living, to suffer, if in the whole world

there is not enough of compassion found to save her from a doom of such unimagined horror ; one only, but that one so unspeakably precious in the sight of the God who made her for Himself, that we know His beloved Son would have come down from heaven to die in His awful agony for her alone, had she only of all the human race been perishing and sinful. You speak of thousands like her. Is it not enough to crush one's very soul with horror to think of what they are in the sight of the Righteous Heaven, and shall be, too probably, forever ? And the thought that it is their own fellow-creatures who have thus blasted their souls with eternal ruin, makes one wonder that God should still withhold the fire which one day must justly burn to ashes a world so cruel and so polluted. And can you think, Hugh, that, apart from the judgment which will fall on the active agents in the ruin of the thousands of whom you speak, there will be no account demanded of their blood from those who were passive instruments in their destruction, who might have helped, who might have saved them, and *would not* ?—on such as I am, who ought to be ready to give my whole life to win all and any I could ? Am I to abstain from rescuing one, one actually given into my hand, because some painful humiliation, some bitter censure, may come to wound my vanity, from those who make this world's approval the idol of their worship ? Oh, what will all that world be to me when I am lying cold and stiff in the grave, whence there is no return ! How more than worthless in that time of silent waiting will be its praise or blame—the praise or blame of those who will be dust and ashes like myself. But will not the doom of that one lost soul be everything to me,—the soul that will meet me at the

bar of judgment, and cry out against me, 'You might have saved me, and you did not; therefore you are my condemnation, you my sentence, you my everlasting despair'?"

Ernestine paused, her whole frame trembling with strong feeling; then she went on with a quiet sadness, which was very touching:

"Hugh, I am to be your wife, and I will not now do anything which you could afterward regret your wife had done. If you absolutely require me to give up the effort to save this most unhappy child, I will do so; and I will not vex you with any expressions of regret when the matter is once settled; but just now, while it is still an open question, while her fate still hangs in the balance, I cannot keep back from you that I do so strongly feel the obligation laid upon me in her behalf, that if I now abandon her I shall bring a lasting grief and remorse upon myself, which not all the happiness I look for in my life with you will have power to banish. I shall never be able to forget her going down to the grave and to her terrible eternity, without one voice to warn her, one hand stretched out to save her from uttermost destruction. Hugh, you may think me absurd and romantic if you will, but I know too surely that at the very altar by your side I shall seem to hear the cry of that perishing soul. I shall ever hear it in all the bright days we hope to spend together, and oh, most of all, I shall hear it on my bed of death, when my own life is finished, written down to the last line, and sealed up against the great account, with but one record of her in all its pages, 'I knew that she was perishing, and I left her to perish when I might have saved her.'"

As Ernestine finished speaking, and bent down her

head waiting for his decision, Lingard suddenly started up and went to the window, where he stood for a few minutes silent, struggling with thoughts that were altogether unaccountable to himself. That Ernestine, so good, so innocent—faultless, indeed, in his eyes,—should thus accuse herself of heavy guilt, and expect a life-long remorse because she believed herself a passive agent in the wide-spread evil, wherein he held the most active instrumentality to be but a trifling folly not worth remembering or regretting,—had aroused a tumult in his mind which he could neither comprehend nor resist. For one moment it was as though some lightning flash had revealed a glimpse of the dazzling purity, the awful uncompromising holiness of that Fount and Essence of all goodness, in which he did not, and even in that hour would not believe,—while in the same light the true nature of sin in its foul blackness darkened visibly on his sight. For a brief space his soul was in the grasp of truth, and cowered down, well-nigh overwhelmed; but the impression was transient. Soon a rush of habitual thoughts and feelings swarmed on his mind; again the shadows closed over the transient gleam; the ground which for a moment had appeared steady beneath his feet seemed once more to rock to and fro on its insecure foundation, and his mind drifted helplessly back into its wonted chaos of doubts, misgivings, and sophistries, mingled with evil desires and dim aspirations. He was himself again very speedily; but when he turned to come back to Ernestine, there was an unusually grave and gentle expression on his face; and the half-playful, half-bitter sarcasm with which he had treated the matter at first had quite disappeared.

“Ernestine, I will thwart you no more,” he said

softly; "do what good you can in your generation and in your own way, you shall never be hindered by me. What am I that I should stand between your pity and any poor wretch, however degraded she may be?" and as Ernestine thanked him, with a warmth of gratitude which showed how greatly she was relieved, he bent down to catch every tone of her low sweet voice, seeming to thirst for the assurance that he was thus indirectly associated with her in her loving charity.

"There is one condition, Ernie dearest, which I must make with you for your own sake," he continued, after a moment's silence, "and that is, that you keep me to a certain extent *au courant* of your proceedings in this matter; it is very possible that you may find yourself in some position where you will really require help and advice; and I shall not be easy about you unless I have the certainty that you will always at least tell me where you are."

"I will, gladly," said Ernestine; "it will be a great comfort to me; and you know, Hugh," she added laughingly, "I am to have Mrs. Tompson with me. Don't you think there is some chance of the *convenances* being attended to pretty well?"

"I should think so, indeed. — What agonies she will be in as to what the railway porters and cabmen may think of your proceedings, Ernie! She certainly carries her deference to the world's opinion to the utmost limits of civilization."

"Her whole life consists of a representation of her own and her friends' greatness to the vulgar humanity outside," said Ernestine; "but happily she is much too timid and nervous to think of opposing me, so I shall get my own way, Hugh, all the same."

"And so you ought, my dearest, considering what you are; but, Ernestine," he added, with a playfulness which veiled a real earnestness, "don't go and become too good for me; I am very far from your level now, and I don't wish to find the distance widened between us. I have a horrible dread that I shall see wings growing out on your shoulders some day, and that you will soar away above me, heaven knows where."

"Oh, no fear," said Ernestine, laughing merrily. "I think, on the contrary, when I am out in the world on my adventures, I shall always be longing to rush back and hide in a corner beside you; and that is just what I shall do when my quest is over, if only I am successful."

"Well, now I want to tell you that I expect to be ready for you sooner than we thought," said Lingard; and he proceeded to explain to her that his prospects of a more lucrative appointment than that he now held were much nearer their fulfillment than he had supposed, and that he believed their marriage might take place before many months were over.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SEARCH AT CARLETON HALL.

THE next afternoon saw Ernestine Courtenay in a railway carriage speeding away to the pretty village near which Annie Brook's father lived, as lodge-keeper to Lord Carleton. Opposite to her sat Mrs. Tompson, a lady with drab-colored hair, pinched features, and a thin figure, attired in good taste, but with the most minute attention to the prevailing fashion on all points; there was not a fold out of place in her silk dress or a wrinkle in her irreproachable kid gloves, yet she looked as if made of inferior clay beside her quiet charge, who in her simple garments and unobtrusive demeanor was singularly attractive even to strangers, from the touching sweetness of expression which gave such a charm to her delicate features and soft brown eyes. Ernestine would have valued this gift of winning insensibly on all who saw her, had she known how useful it would prove to her in her future career, but she was too unconscious of self to be aware of it, and only wondered how it was that even strangers were so kind to her wherever she went. The twilight was stealing over the earth when they reached their destination, and Mrs. Tompson experienced the first of many shocks she was destined to receive in her attendance on Ernestine, when she found her quite resolved to pass the night at the village inn, in spite of the fact that below the really pleasant

rooms assigned to them there was a very undisguised tap.

"My dear," said Mrs. Tompson, clasping the well-gloved hands, "this is quite unheard-of, and most unnecessary. You are acquainted with Lord and Lady Carleton, and their house is, of course, the only suitable abode for you in this place; you have only to write a note to Lady Carleton, saying you are accidentally passing through the neighborhood, and would have much pleasure in spending a day or two with her, and you will find her delighted to receive you."

"But I am not passing accidentally, and it would not give me any pleasure at all to spend a day with her," said Ernestine; "so you see I must not say that; and besides, I could not possibly stay at their house under the circumstances. Now, let me beg you to order tea, and make yourself quite comfortable, and I shall soon come back to you." And before Mrs. Tompson had time to prepare another speech, Ernestine had closed the door behind her, and soon she was to be seen from the window walking lightly down the village street. Mrs. Tompson did not attempt to follow. She knew perfectly well that Miss Courtenay would not be deterred from doing what she thought right; and a secret instinct seemed to tell her also that her actions were regulated by a somewhat higher code than her own. So she proceeded to establish what she was pleased to term her "weak frame" on the horse-hair sofa; and in a painful combat between the angularities of the "frame" and those of the sofa, she found enough to occupy her till Ernestine's return.

Meanwhile Ernestine Courtenay was walking quickly along the pleasant country road which led to Carleton

Hall. She had no difficulty in finding her way, according to the directions given to her, and soon came in sight of the pretty rustic lodge, with its trim garden, where the gate-keeper lived. It stood almost in a nest of bright spring flowers, the walls covered with trailing plants; in front of it lay the park, where the deer were browsing quietly; behind it rose noble trees and luxuriant shrubberies, glowing with the beautiful but evanescent hues of the opening year, and over all was the tender light of the sunset sky, where the evening star shone pure and pale in its ethereal solitude. Ernestine leant against the gate for a few moments, looking round on the sweet peaceful scene; and she thought sadly how, but a few years before, Lois and Annie had dwelt there as innocent children, and how they played in their careless glee upon that fair green grass, and slept the sleep of guileless hearts beneath that cottage roof; but now!—by her brother's evil deeds the one was laid in the dust of death, and the other buried in a corruption worse than that of the grave. The mournful recollection nerved her to proceed with her task, which she felt was, even in this first step, very difficult.

Matthew Brook must be aware of Lois's fate by this time, as she had been told that the coroner had written to him with full particulars. He knew now, therefore, even if he had not known it before, that Colonel Courtenay was the cause of her death; and Ernestine felt that she could not venture to cross Brook's threshold if there was any chance of her being known as that man's sister; but this did not seem likely; while, on the other hand, she feared he might resent an entire stranger speaking to him of the disgrace of his children. Ernestine had been very little among the poor, or she

would have known that there was small chance of their having such refined and sensitive feelings as she would have had in a matter of this kind. There was enough, however, to make the visit really formidable to one of her sympathetic nature, and her courage would almost have failed her had she not thoroughly counted the cost when she undertook her mission, and prepared herself for many a painful moment in the course of it.

She went up to the door and knocked gently. It was opened by a woman, with a child in her arms and another clinging to her skirts. She had a pleasant, but somewhat expressionless face, with a worn, fatigued look, as if she had found the cares of matrimony rather too oppressive.

"Can I speak to Matthew Brook?" said Ernestine, addressing her.

"Surely, ma'am," said the woman, curtsying as she recognized "one of the gentlefolk" in her visitor; "he is just a-sitting down to his supper; please to walk in;" and she ushered her into a neat tidy cottage, where, at a little round table, placed before a blazing fire, her husband sat with a plate of bread and cheese beside him, and two or three children clustering round him. He rose as Ernestine entered, and turned toward her a hard weather-beaten face, with strongly-marked features and considerable sternness of expression; but he bowed respectfully, and begged her to sit down. His wife, who seemed at least twenty years younger than he was, brought forward a chair, told the children to mind their manners and stand out of the way, and in another moment Ernestine found herself placed in front of Lois Brook's father, who sat silently waiting for her to speak.

"I must ask you to excuse my intruding upon you,"

said Ernestine, with the gentle courtesy which is too often considered an unnecessary luxury for the poor, even in their own houses, "but I have come on a very painful errand."

Brook looked up keenly at her.

"You have heard, doubtless," she went on to say, her voice trembling, "of the sad death of your child, your daughter Lois?"

The man's face darkened like a thunder-cloud. "I have heard of the death of Lois Brook," he answered, "but she is no child of mine. From the day that she crossed that door-step to go to her disgrace, I have counted her a stranger to me, and so she is now when her shame has been made public. She is no child of mine."

"Oh, surely still your child!" said Ernestine. "She has done very wrong, and she has suffered cruelly for it, but she is what God made her—your own child?"

"No," he said, striking his clinched fist on the table beside him, "I won't have her called so! She was told what she had to expect if she ever disgraced herself, and she knew I would never go back from my word. I gave my children a good home, and brought them up respectable. I taught them their duty, and took them to church, and stinted myself that they might have the best of schooling, and they knew that so long as they did well they'd share every bit I'd got; but I told them, ay, and swore it to them, times on times, that so surely as they took to evil ways, and brought disgrace on themselves and me, they'd have to tramp for it, and they might seek a home and a father where they pleased, for they'd find none in my house never no more. So I said then, and so I says now to these children here," he

added, stretching out his hand toward two pretty little fair-haired girls, "the same as I said it to them as is gone, and I'll keep my word to one and the whole of them, they may depend on it."

"You have just reason to be angry," said Ernestine ; "but the fault was not all Lois's. She was deceived and cruelly deserted ; the treatment she met with drove her to her dreadful death."

"No doubt," said Brook grimly ; "and the fine gentleman as ruined her will have to pay for it in kingdom come, if all is true as the parsons tell us. But that's no excuse for Lois. I taught her her place, and she knew she had no business to go looking after any grand gentleman, or to let him come swaggering here to play with an honest girl's good name when her father's back was turned. I told her what stuff such as he were made of, and what fine sport it is to them to take a decent man's daughter and make her only fit, as they think, to be trampled under their feet, and then flung away to die in a ditch. Yes, yes, I know, and I warned Lois of them ; what she did, she did with her eyes open, and she must e'en abide by it."

"She must indeed," said Ernestine, with her sweet pathetic voice ; "for we can neither help the dead, nor speak forgiveness to them, however sorely they may need it. But I only mentioned Lois, because I wished to tell you what her last desire and prayer in this world were."

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said Brook's wife ; "but were you with the poor wench when she died?"

"O no," said Ernestine sadly ; "God alone saw her last agony."

"Stupid ! how could she be," said Brook angrily,

"when you know the girl went and drowned herself in the night?"—and Ernestine could see that there was strong agitation working under his apparent harshness.

"But if I guesses right, ma'am," he continued, turning to Ernestine, "you are the lady that put her in the ground, and saved her a work'us funeral?"

"Yes," said Ernestine; "it was the only thing I could do for her, and I was very pleased to do it."

"And I thank you for it, I will say that; bad as Lois has behaved to me, I am glad that she who was once known as my daughter was not buried like a work'us tramp. I do thank you for that, ma'am; and I am bound to listen to anything you may have to say, though what's the good of talking or thinking of such a black business, I can't tell, I'm sure," and he writhed uneasily from side to side as he spoke.

"But it is of the living, not the dead, I have come to speak to you now," said Ernestine. "Lois left a letter, which fell into my hands, in which she made the most earnest entreaty that her sister Annie might be sought for and saved from such a fate as hers had been."

Brook started at the name, and clinched his fist violently.

"Annie!" he thundered. "She is as dead to me as the other is, and more so, for the grave where Lois lies can tell no tales, but while Annie lives, her shame would fall back on me if I still owned her for my child. I would not so much as hear her name from any but yourself, ma'am, and it is not a bit of good your talking of her; better not, far better not." There was an appealing look under all the fierce anger of his eyes, as

he turned them on Ernestine, which convinced her that this child had a firmer hold on his heart than ever Lois had, and that the struggle with his own feelings obliged him to take refuge in greater violence.

"Just let me tell you what I have to say, and I will trouble you no more," said Ernestine gently. "I resolved, when I read the heart-broken letter poor Lois wrote on behalf of her sister, that I would never rest till I had fulfilled her last dying wish, and rescued Annie from a life of sin and a death of misery. I gave her my promise that I would do so, as I held her cold hand in mine, and I will keep my word, though it was given to a silent corpse. Let it cost me what it may, I will never cease my efforts for your poor lost child till I have brought her back, if I can, to her Father in heaven, with whom is all mercy and forgiveness. It is for this purpose I have come to you. I thought I might have found her here, or that you might know where she is."

"Here!" exclaimed Brook. "She shall never enter this house till I am carried out of it feet foremost. I know nothing of her, nor I don't want to."

"Oh do not say so," exclaimed Ernestine. "If only I can find her and bring her back to penitence, where should she come but to her father's house? and indeed, from all I have heard, I feel sure she was far less to blame than Lois was: she quite believed her sister was married when she went to her, and had no idea of the evils and temptations that awaited her."

"Then she believed Lois's false words more than my true ones," said Brook. "I told her plain enough what Lois was, and she knew I had disowned her, and would serve her the same if she followed in her sister's steps."

She knew this well, and she left my house unbeknown to me and without my leave, and went to her worthless sister; and now as she has made her bed so she may lie on it."

"I do not mean to excuse her," said Ernestine; "but she was young and unsuspecting, and her sister, whom she loved so much, persuaded her to come. At all events, whatever may have been her fault in the past, don't say you will refuse to take her in, if I can bring her back to you repentant."

"But I do say it, and I will," he replied, smiting the table fiercely. "Find her if you can, and do your best with her. It is good of you to trouble yourself for such a one as she is, and I won't say but what I am thankful to you for it, but never let me hear her name, or see her with the sight of my eyes inside of this house. She shall not come while I am alive to bar the door against her."

"Your own child!" said Ernestine. "Will you not show mercy, as you hope for it yourself? What would become of any one of us if our Father in heaven so took vengeance on our sins?"

"I have other children to consider besides her," said Brook doggedly.

"But they are so young they could not suffer any harm from intercourse with her."

"They are not too young to suffer the loss of their home and their livelihood, and that is what it would come to if I brought a fallen woman into this house, be she twenty times my daughter."

"How is that possible?" exclaimed Ernestine. "Who could have the right to prevent you doing as you like in your own house, and with your own child?"

"Those to whom the house belongs, and whose money buys my children's bread," said Brook. "I must do what pleases my Lord and my Lady, or leave the house and the money to another lodge-keeper. There's many a one would be glad to step into my shoes—ay, and many a one watches to see me make a false move, that they may get into them."

"But Lord and Lady Carleton would never object to your receiving your daughter, if she were really penitent, and came to your house only to seek a shelter from sin and temptation."

"Would they not? Did they not send and tell me, when Lois went, and again when Annie left, that if ever one or the other of them was seen within the park-gates I should be turned out without a day's notice? Did not Mrs. Brace, the housekeeper, in her silks and satins, bring me the message herself, and sit there as proud as a peacock, tossing her head and speaking of my girls as if she would not touch them with a pair of tongs, let alone my Lady? And I'd like you to tell me, ma'am," continued Brook, turning round and putting his elbows on the table, while he looked full at Ernestine with a strangely sinister expression,—*"I'd like you just to tell me how it is, that among you gentlefolks what is thought a shameful sin in a poor girl is neither a sin nor yet a shame in a fine gentleman? At the very time Mrs. Brace brought me my Lord's and Lady's message, Colonel Courtenay, the grand swaggering Colonel that ruined my pretty Lois, was staying at the Hall courting my Lady's niece, Miss Julia Talbot; and who so civil to him as my Lord, and who so pleased to see him as my Lady? And they knew just as well as I did that my child's ruin lay at his door, and that his sin was the*

same as hers, to say the least of it,—for I take it his was something the blackest of the two,—anyhow, the one was as bad as the other; but she was not to dare to show her face within her father's door, at the risk of bringing us all to the work'us, while he was to ride with my Lady in her carriage, and sit with my Lord at his table, and have the whole house at his beck and call like master and more." Brook paused a moment, still looking fixedly at Ernestine, and then said, "Ma'am, our parson tells us that God Almighty knows all things: I should just like to know whether He knows these things, and if He does, what He thinks of them?"

Ernestine bent down her head, unable for the moment to make him any answer, so keenly did the truth of his words strike home to her sense of right. She had felt her brother's guilt heavily enough, as her present conduct testified, and the general injustice of the world in the matter had struck her, as she stood by Lois's dead body; but the whole dreadful subject was of course entirely new to her, and it was the first time that her eyes had been opened to the practical working of the conventional law which visits sins of this description without mercy on the woman, the weaker sinner, while it leaves honored and unscathed the man who has destroyed her. Ernestine shuddered as she thought how these things would appear when weighed in the balance of immaculate justice, but she had too much conscientious courage to gloss over the truth now, even to the hard man before her. She looked up at him with her candid eyes, and said, "It is a most cruel injustice; but you may be sure it is one which is hateful in the sight of the righteous God, and for which He will surely require us to give account in our final trial.

I still think, however, that Lady Carleton would not refuse to let you give your daughter Annie a shelter, if she were really penitent; now especially, when poor Lois can claim no more pity from either her or you. At all events, I will see her to-morrow and try to gain her consent, provided you will promise me that if she does agree, you will not persist in your refusal to give the poor child a home."

"It is of no use to ask her, ma'am; you may save yourself the trouble."

"Still I may succeed; only say that if I do, and if I can bring Annie back to you, you will receive her."

"Well, if you would take her by the hand, so that folk should not think she was altogether lost, I won't say but what I might," said Brook; "but there—it is no use thinking of it. I know well enough what your answer will be at the Hall."

"Still I have your promise," said Ernestine, rising, "and I thank you sincerely for it, as indeed for your patience in listening to all I had to say. One question more I must ask: can you give me any idea where Annie is now?"

"None at all; I know nothing of her," said Brook, relapsing into his sullen manner.

"Then she has never written to any of you?" asked Ernestine.

"She knew better than to do that," said Brook. "She'd have had her letter back just as she sent it. No, the last I can tell you of her is this: she stood there the night afore she left us, as pretty and innocent a little maid as ever you'd wish to see. She stood there looking at me, and I could see tears in her eyes, and I thought she were fretting because I had spoken a bit

sharp to her for loitering about the gate; but I little thought she was giving just these few tears to the father and the home she would never see again."

"Oh, don't say never!" exclaimed Ernestine. "I must hope she may yet return to be a comfort to you, and all the more dutiful, because she has once fallen so far. If I succeed with Lady Carleton, I will come and tell you; if you do not see me, you will know I have failed."

"I shall not see you," said Brook determinedly.

"In that case I must do the best I can for Annie without your help; but I hope better things from Lady Carleton."

Ernestine then took her leave, bending so tenderly over the children as she bade them farewell, that both Brook and his wife seemed touched. He took off his hat, as he opened the gate for her, with a degree of genuine respect, which was very different from the conventional civility he usually showed to visitors at the Hall. Ernestine had gone some way down the road, when she heard a rapid step behind her, and turning she saw Brook's wife hastening after her. She came up breathless.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, but I think this may help you to find our Annie," she said, holding out a water-colored portrait of a young girl. "A lady who was staying at the Hall once, thought her so pretty that she made this likeness of her, and her father can't a-bear to see it, so I hid it away, and never thought of it till you was gone."

"Oh, thank you," said Ernestine, taking it; "it will help me very much indeed. Is it really like her?"

"It is just her very self," said Mrs. Brook, "only it was the lady dressed her up with flowers that way;

her father would never have let her wear them so ;” and taking leave once more, the woman went back to her cottage.

Ernestine stood looking at the drawing in the fast failing light ; it was skillfully executed, and represented a girl not more than sixteen, with a sweet childish face, lovely in its look of happiness. Large eyes, of that limpid blue we see only in the early morning sky, sunny hair falling in bright waves from under a wreath of lilies of the valley, and lips parted in a smile of playful archness, combined to represent the very type of light-hearted innocence, and of girlish beauty undimmed by blight or shadow. As Ernestine gazed sadly on it, she felt her very soul rise up in indignation against the man who, in his selfish wickedness, had forever marred this fair creation of the God of goodness, and darkened all that guileless loveliness with the ineffaceable stains of guilt and shame. That face, so bright with the sunshine of a soul unawakened yet to sorrow or to evil, was indeed blotted out from the very universe ; since the best she could now hope for was to see one day those clear blue eyes looking sorrowfully out through penitential tears, and those smiling lips quivering with anguish, as they confessed the sin, repented bitterly, but never to be undone. It seemed to her a very marvel, that even the world’s code of justice should impose on society so cruel a wrong as that which Brook’s words had brought home so forcibly to her mind. If there were to be any distinction in the sin, the punishment, and the degradation of Annie Brook and her betrayer, surely the heaviest burden should fall on the mature man of the world, and not on the frail ignorant child, who knew neither trial nor temptation till he lured her from the shelter of her father’s roof.

CHAPTER X.

LADY CARLETON'S DECISION.

It was with ineffable satisfaction that Mrs. Tomp-son heard next morning of Ernestine's intention to visit Lady Carleton, although assured that she did not intend to spend more than an hour at the Hall. This was sufficient to enable the anxious chaperon to mention the fact before the innkeeper, in such terms as should convince that functionary that Miss Courtenay's proper abode had been in the aristocratic mansion, and not in his own ignominious dwelling.

"So distressing to reflect on what he must have thought of us!" she said to Ernestine.

"Who?—the innkeeper?" Ernestine answered, laughing. "I cannot say I have reflected about him at all; but now I shall go at once to Lady Carleton, as I am anxious we should start for Greyburgh in time to reach it to-night. I have not heard from Reginald this morning as I expected, and I begin to fear he is seriously ill."

Ernestine found Lady Carleton at home, and to her great relief there was no one with her but her sister, Miss Verney, a lady *d'un certain age*, who was reported, according to the phraseology of her set, to have become "serious," since the fatal lapse of years had caused her matrimonial ambition to descend from the marquises and earls of her earlier hopes, to the rectors and

widowers, who were now, so far as she was concerned, the only game in season.

Lady Carleton received Ernestine with the utmost cordiality. Their previous acquaintance had been slight, but Colonel Courtenay had been very intimate at the Hall, where he had first met his wife; and it would have been music to Mrs. Tompson's ears to have heard Lady Carleton's pressing invitation to Ernestine to stay and spend a few days with them.

"Thank you very much," said Ernestine, "but I have only an hour to spare. I must hasten on to Greyburgh to see my brother Reginald, who is ill. My object in coming here to-day was to ask you a great favor," she added, looking up with her sweet eyes into the calm expressionless face that was turned toward her.

"I trust I may be able to do anything you wish," said Lady Carleton.

"I am afraid the subject is one which may be disagreeable to you," said Ernestine, coloring painfully; "but my request may really involve the whole future welfare of a very unhappy person."

"Going to ask for a subscription," thought Miss Verney; "she need not come to me, while the dear Vicar of Dulton's new aisle is unfinished."

"I have heard," Ernestine went on, "through some very painful circumstances, of a young girl named Annie Brook, the daughter of one of your lodge-keepers, and it is on her behalf I have come to speak to you."

Lady Carleton's face grew rigid. "My dear Miss Courtenay, you cannot be in the least aware what sort of a person this individual is, or you would certainly not wish to mention her to me or to any one."

"I know too well what she is," replied Ernestine ; "and it is because the strongest efforts are about to be made to rescue her out of her dreadful life, that I come with a request to you. If these efforts should succeed," she went on hurriedly ; "if she should become truly repentant, and only anxious to hide from those who have known her otherwise, will you allow her father to give her a shelter in his house again ? He is quite willing to take her, if you do not object."

"If Brook leaves my service he will naturally do as he pleases. I shall have no control over him. Of course, you do not propose a person of bad character venturing within a lodge on our property ?" said Lady Carleton, with the utmost stiffness.

"Only if she were altogether penitent and changed, wishing nothing but to live a humble, unnoticed life. Brook cannot give up his situation without bringing his other children to want and misery ; so that if he received her at all, it must be here ; and it would seem too cruel to refuse her the shelter of her father's roof, if she were seeking to fly from a life and a future so dreadful as hers is now."

"Are you aware, Miss Courtenay, that Brook's lodge is actually within our own gates, inside the park, and that my sister and I and our guests sometimes take shelter there from a shower of rain ?"

"But you need hold no intercourse with this poor child," said Ernestine eagerly ; "and, after all, how many there are whom we meet in society, at least among men, whom we have far more reason to shun than a miserable girl who has been the victim of such as they are."

It was with something more than coldness that Lady Carleton answered now : "Miss Courtenay, I am really

totally unaccustomed to discussions on subjects of this nature."

"Had I not better leave the room?" interrupted Miss Verney, rising with an air of injured innocence.

"Pray do nothing of the kind, Lorina," said Lady Carleton hastily; "Miss Courtenay will not, I am sure, continue so very unpleasant a conversation. I do not know from what theories you may draw your ideas," she added, addressing Ernestine, "but mine are those which have been always received in society, and I can in no way depart from them; allow me to decline pursuing the subject further."

There was nothing more to be said, and after a few constrained speeches on indifferent subjects, Ernestine rose to go.

The cold politeness with which the ladies who had received her so cordially now took leave of her, was the first indication of the truth which was to meet her at every turn, that she could not unscathed run counter to the opinion of the world, however false and godless that opinion might be. Ernestine was not indifferent to the painful knowledge thus acquired. No one, especially no woman, can brave the censure of the class to which she belongs, without being made to feel it keenly; nor does the righteousness of the cause which has made her depart from received opinion prevent her from growing daily more sensitive to the blame she has provoked. She may be, as Ernestine was, too unselfish to forsake the truth and the right, because her defense of it brings the world's contumely on her head; but the harsh judgment that will assail her, the unworthy motives that will be attributed to her, the misconceptions and exaggerations which her every action will call forth, must grad-

ually make her shrink more and more into herself, till she finds herself happiest in the isolation to which she has involuntarily exiled herself. As yet Ernestine anticipated nothing of this, nor of far deeper pangs which her present course was one day to cost her; and she tried to shake off the feeling of humiliation and wounded pride which her interview with Lady Carleton had left on her mind. The sight of Brook's lodge was efficacious at once in chasing away all thoughts of self. As she drew near it she could see that he was standing, hidden, as he thought, by the muslin curtain of the lattice-window, watching her eagerly as she came down the avenue. She felt he was waiting to see if her errand had been successful, and if he might take home the lost child toward whom his indifference had been so much more assumed than real. She knew well she had not a hope to offer him, and she passed his door with her head bowed sadly down, and her heart aching with that strong sense of the injustice of men's dealings, one with another, which strikes us sometimes with such painful acuteness.

Mrs. Brook came out to open the gate for her, and looked inquiringly in her face.

"I suppose the poor wench is not to come home, ma'am?"

"I am very sorry I have failed to get leave for her; but will you tell your husband that if only I can find her, I will take care that she finds a shelter in some safe home, where I hope he will come and see her?"

"God bless you, ma'am. I am right glad Annie has found a friend in you; she is no child of mine, but she were as sweet a little maid as ever you see, and I can't help fretting over her when I mind her merry ways, and

how she used to go singing about the house like a bird. There was never a bit of harm in her, ma'am. She were a thought too frolicsome, perhaps; but she was light of heart, poor dear."

"I will tell her how kindly you speak of her, if I can find her," said Ernestine, pressing the woman's hand as she turned away to go forward in her search.

CHAPTER XI.

GREYBURGH.

ERNESTINE COURTENAY had never seen Greyburgh before, and she now saw it under the circumstances most favorable both to its beauty of outward aspect, and to the teeming associations which gave life and charm to every step within its walls. Its beautiful gardens, its fair meadows and shady walks, were in all the glory of their fresh spring loveliness; the stately trees, that arched over its finest avenue till it looked like the nave of a glorious cathedral, or dipped their branches in the graceful winding river, were all bright with the luxuriant green that had renewed their youth; and the sparkling waters, covered with gay boats, that went shooting to and fro with their merry crews, glanced along under blossoming shrubberies and violet-covered banks. Side by side with this living nature, this freshness of youth and beauty, rose up in somber stateliness the dark old colleges, like petrifications of the thoughts and hopes and aspirations of the long-buried dead,—the glittering sunlight serving only to bring out in stronger relief the deep shadows cast by their massive proportions.

A more striking representation of past and present could scarcely have been imagined. The smiling gardens and sunny riverside were teeming, not with the life of nature only, but with the young life of the pres-

ent generation in all the promise of early manhood; while, within the solemn colleges, beneath the chapel altars and the somber corridors, the dead of ages past, the strength and sinews of the nation once, lay mouldering in their forgotten graves. And with this contrast,—the sure knowledge that all the life and brightness of the one must soon dissolve into the gloom and silence of the other, would have been strangely mournful, had it not been that there was a revelation of the future also in the clear blue sky, with its infinite depths of fathomless ether, that arched over living and dead alike, and spoke of an eternity for both.

It was in the radiance of the early morning that Ernestine thus saw Greyburgh for the first time, as she took her way to the college to which Reginald belonged. They had reached the hotel too late the night before to visit him then, but Ernestine had written to tell him of her arrival, and to ask when she could see him, either at the hotel where she was staying, or in his rooms, and the tone of his answer heightened her anxiety on his account. He wrote thus:

“DEAREST ERNIE,—I am very sorry you have come here, and yet I shall be only too delighted to see you. You must come to me; I cannot leave my rooms. Since you are here, do not delay letting me have you with me a moment longer than you can help. I shall expect to see you as soon as the college gates are open to-morrow morning.—R. C.”

This was all, and Ernestine was greatly perplexed by it. She knew it was no want of affection for herself which made him regret her coming, and she waited

with anxiety for the moment when she should be able to ascertain the meaning of the strange state of mind in which he seemed to be. She was at the gate of the college, one of the oldest in Greyburgh, at the hour he had named, and, as she turned into the deep shadows of the quadrangle, with its dark walls and time-worn statues, she felt as if she had stepped from the living world into the realms of the past. Having mastered, by the help of a passing servant, the meaning of the cabalistic direction given her by the porter as to the position of Mr. Courtenay's rooms—"two five to the right,"—she made her way up the steep stone staircase to his door.

"Mr. Courtenay sports oak most days," said the servant, hastening up before her; "but I can get in, and I will tell him you are here, ma'am." In another moment he returned, flung open the door, and closed it again upon Ernestine, as she entered a sitting-room, arranged after the fashion of most undergraduates' rooms, though with abundant indication, in the books and papers which strewed the tables, and in the engravings on the walls, that Reginald Courtenay was not one of the fast men of his college. The room was empty, but a half-open door led into another, and Ernestine went in at once. On the threshold, however, she stopped, startled to the last degree at the sight which presented itself. The room was small, like most college bed-rooms, and contained little besides the bed and a table covered with books, where a lamp, which Reginald had apparently forgotten to extinguish, still burned with a sickly flame, scarce visible in the bright sunshine that filled the room. Reginald himself sat in a low easy chair at the open window, gazing out into the clear sky, which alone

was visible from it. He did not hear his sister's light step, and she had time to scan the familiar face, so changed that she scarcely recognized it before he turned. It was nearly a year since she had seen him. In the previous long vacation he had gone with a reading-party to Wales, and had, much to her regret, avoided, on some slight pretext, coming to London to see her before returning to Greyburgh in October. When they last met, he had been delicate looking, as he always was, but the indications of weakness of the chest, which had often alarmed her about him, had been less apparent than formerly. In the interval, he had never said a word about failing health, and had, indeed, written rarely and briefly, although his letters, short as they were, had betrayed a *malaise*, either mental or bodily, which had caused her a vague uneasiness. And now, as she looked at him, the conviction came upon her, sudden and irresistible, that he was not only dangerously ill, but that he had scarce a few days to live. The shock of this overwhelming impression was so great that she stood transfixed to the spot, scanning in dismay the wasted features, with their unmistakable symptoms of decaying life, and the attenuated figure, lying motionless in the languor of utter weakness. He was but one and twenty, and had been remarkable for the refined beauty of his face. It was now white and sharp of outline as if cut in marble, and all that remained to him of life seemed gathered in his dark eyes, which looked, from his extreme emaciation, unnaturally large, and were glowing with a restless feverish light, that spoke of intense unrest. The heavy masses of his dark hair, damp with the dews of weakness, were pushed back from his hollow temples, as if their weight were too much for

him. His parched lips were perfectly colorless, and the thin, transparent hands, hanging listlessly down, seemed moulded in wax. He was fully dressed, but the clothes hung loosely on his wasted limbs, and there was a hopeless decay written on every line of the sinking, feeble frame.

An involuntary sob broke from Ernestine, and Reginald turned his eyes upon her. In another instant she was at his side, his dry, feverish hands in hers, and her warm kiss pressed on his cold, white cheek.

"Reginald, dearest, surely you are fearfully ill?"

"Sick unto death, dear Ernie," he answered, in a weak, hollow voice. His breath came quick and fast.

"Oh, why did you not tell me?" she said, bowing her face on his hands in an agony of grief.

"Because I did not want to cause you needless pain. Ernie, don't cry," he continued, breathing hurriedly; "I cannot bear it; my load is heavy enough already. I have had to look my wretchedness in the face night and day, and it has been as much as I can endure; if I have to see your misery, too, it will drive me distracted."

He spoke with a feverish excitement, which was evidently too much for him, and Ernestine felt it was absolutely necessary she should control herself. She rose from his side and went into the other room, where she bathed her tearful face in cold water, struggled determinately to regain composure, and, coming back to him with a smile, she took a chair quietly and sat down beside him.

"There," she said, "you shall see no more weakness, Reggie. I am going to be your nurse, and you know a nurse has no business to be hysterical."

He smiled faintly, as he stroked the soft hair from her face with his wasted hand.

"That is right," he said. "I want to see your face calm and sweet as I remember it when I was ill before. It used often to make me think of a clear, quiet lake reflecting the light of heaven. How the sight of you soothed and refreshed me then, and how I have longed for you since!"

"But, then, why not send for me, darling?" said Ernestine. "Could you suppose it possible that it would not be far more pain to me to know that you had been ill and suffering without me, than to be with you and try my best to help you?"

"Yes, because at a distance you would only have known that I was dead—dead of rapid consumption,—and you would have grieved for me, I know, but there would have been no sting in your grief; and now, I fear—I fear," he continued, clasping his hands painfully, "you will learn all that makes death terrible in my case. I am too weak to control myself; I know that I shall tell you all in some moment of agony. I have cried out to these bare walls sometimes, when the horror of my fate was strong upon me."

"I hope, indeed, you will tell me all," said Ernestine, flinging her arms round him; "whatever you have to suffer it must be best that I should share it with you."

"Ernestine, you do not know what you are saying," said Reginald, with a vehemence which brought on a fit of coughing. When it was over he leant back exhausted. After a few minutes he said, feebly, "Ernie, promise me you will never question me. If I am driven to confide in you by my own misery, you must bear the evil; but in the mean time I want to find com-

fort, if it be possible, in your presence. I don't want to be always struggling with you. Promise to ask me nothing."

"I will promise, dearest," said Ernestine, soothingly. "I have but one wish, and that is to be a comfort to you, if I can, and it shall be in the way that suits you best."

He looked up to her with a grateful smile. "Let us talk of something else, then," he said.

"Well, tell me, who is your doctor?" said Ernestine.

"Dr. Compton, the best physician, and one of the most scientific men in the university. So I have all the help that skill can give me, but he has owned long ago that he can do nothing except to give a passing relief. He will be here presently, and you can see him. I have a nurse, too, whom he sent me; the best old woman in the world. You must not send her away, Ernie; she has quite devoted herself to me, and she does everything for me which I am too weak to do for myself."

"I am glad you have got her, but I do not think she ought to have let you get up to-day; I am sure you should have been in bed."

"My dear Ernie, I have not been in bed all night."

"Not been in bed!"

"No; it is one of the things I cannot do," he said, with a shudder; "it is like lying down in my coffin; it will be soon enough when the time comes; doctor and nurse have both given up trying to make me do it. I asked Dr. Compton if he could logically prove it would signify one atom to myself, or to anything in the universe, if I died a week sooner in consequence of keeping out of bed, and he could not. Besides, he knows that the horrors which overtake me when I lie down are more injurious to me than the fatigue of sitting up."

Ernestine was silent from mingled astonishment and distress.

"It seems to me very strange, Reginald," she said, at last, "that the college authorities did not let some of us know how ill you were. Whether you wished it or not, they certainly ought to have done so."

"And so they would, if I had not prevented them by a *ruse*, which you would, no doubt, have thought very wrong. A few falsehoods did it. I told them you and Lady Beaufort were on the continent, and that I did not know your address, but that I told you myself how ill I was, and you would come as soon as you could. George I represented as being perpetually on his voyage from India,—a pretty little string of lies, was it not?"

Reginald telling falsehoods! Ernestine was utterly amazed. Not only had he been from childhood singularly truthful and honorable, but he had, since his illness a few years before, become deeply religious,—his strong impressions in that respect being very remarkable in so young a man, while the excessive sensitiveness of his conscience had reached a pitch that was almost morbid. He had fully intended to take holy orders, and many a dream of missionary enterprise, of high devotedness and self-denial, had he told to Ernestine in the days when they had been together. She had already noted that not a word of faith or resignation had passed his lips in speaking of his precarious state; and each moment convinced her more and more that some fearful change had passed over his spirit which was unaccountable to her. They were interrupted by the arrival of the doctor. He came in, a tall, fair-haired man, with an

intellectual face, and the unmistakable air of a gentleman.

"I am very glad you are come, Miss Courtenay," he said, as Reginald introduced him to her; "your brother will tell you it has not been my fault that some of his relations have not been here long ago."

Ernestine went into the other room to wait till his examination of Reginald was over, and when he joined her there, and closed the door, she looked up at him with tears in her eyes: "Dr. Compton, I cannot tell you how shocked and surprised I am at the condition in which I find my brother. I had no idea he was even seriously ill, and I come to find him dying; it is so, is it not?" she added, with a wistful look, in which a faint hope yet lingered.

"I fear so, indeed; it would be no kindness to conceal it. He cannot last many days. He never told his friends of his condition then?"

"Never. His letters gave me the impression that he was out of health, or low-spirited, but there was not a word to indicate serious illness."

"I feared as much."

"Dr. Compton, what can have brought him to this pass?" said Ernestine anxiously. "He was always subject to delicacy of the chest, but such a sudden decline, such total prostration, seems to prove that his malady must have been aggravated by some unusual circumstances. He is in a very unhappy state of mind, I can see plainly, though I do not know the cause of it. Do you think that mental disquiet can have increased his illness?"

"No doubt it has," said Dr. Compton; "I have seen it with pain, but I could do nothing to prevent it."

"But what can have caused it?" said Ernestine. "I can see that his ideas, and even his principles, are completely changed, and his peace of mind is altogether overthrown. What can be the reason of it?"

A smile, half sad, half amused, passed over Dr. Compton's face.

"His is not the only unsettled mind in the university, Miss Courtenay; but you know that is not my province; I only deal with physical difficulties. Mental disturbance has not, however, been the only evil influence in your brother's malady. He lived too fast last term; a strong man could hardly have stood the life he led, far less a youth so delicate as he was."

"Do you mean that he was dissipated?" said Ernestine, unable in her painful surprise to find a word less crude to express her meaning.

"I fear so," said the doctor gravely; "your brother is young, and Greyburgh is a place of great temptation; but the whole circumstances of his case have been very sad, and much to be regretted."

This put the finishing stroke to Ernestine's astonishment and dismay. Of course, she had not lived so many years in the world without knowing that of many young men such a report would have been nothing surprising; but that Reginald, only one year before so high-souled, so pure-minded, so full of noble desires and holy aspirations, should have fallen into the low dissipation of coarse animal natures, was indeed an overwhelming astonishment to her.

She was roused by Dr. Compton's voice. "Here is Nurse Berry," he said; "she has been very attentive to your brother; I should advise your leaving him with her for a few hours. I have given him a composing

draught, and I trust he will sleep. He never shut his eyes last night, and the duration of his life now mainly depends on the amount of rest he can get."

A tidy motherly-looking woman came curtsying forward as the doctor left the room. She had a pleasant face, with kind, soft eyes, which took Ernestine's fancy at once. She held out her hand to her, as she said warmly :

"Thank you for your kindness to my poor brother, nurse; he is terribly ill, is he not?"

"As ill as he can be, ma'am," said the nurse, tears filling her eyes, "and nothing to comfort him no way. My heart has ached for him many a time. I am very glad you are come to him, ma'am."

"If I had only known he was ill, I should have been here long ago, but there is no help for that now. I must do the best I can for him while he is left to me. The doctor says I must leave him to sleep for the present, but I will come back in a very few hours."

"The evenings are his worst time, ma'am; if you would come to him then it would be best; he mostly dozes through the day, but his evenings and nights are awful; it is a wonder to me he has not been worn out long before; and so I think he would have been if it were not for the heavy sleeping-draughts the doctor gives him; they keep him quiet, in the afternoons at least."

"I shall come early in the evening, and stay all night with him. I do not like leaving him now, but I must, as the doctor wishes it."

She went back to Reginald's room. He was lying quiet, with his eyes closed, but slowly raised the heavy lids as she drew near. She bent down and kissed him.

"Dr. Compton tells me I must leave you to sleep for

a few hours, darling. I cannot bear to be away from you, but I am coming in the evening to stay all night."

"Yes, I shall sleep now," said Reginald, "and sleep is the one only blessing this life can give me; but come back, Ernie, come at night, it is then I shall need you. Save me from myself if you can."

"My Reggie, I would save you from every shadow of evil if I could," said Ernestine, struggling with her tears. He opened his lips as if to reply, then a spasm of mental pain contracted his features; he gave an impatient sigh, turned his face to the wall, and closed his eyes. Ernestine slowly left the room, and the nurse, closing the shutters, sat down for her patient watch, which she enlivened by knitting in the dark with marvelous speed.

CHAPTER XII.

DR. GRANBY.

It would have been easy for Ernestine to have spent the remainder of that day in bitter lamentations over her brother's untimely fate, and in wearying herself with speculations as to the cause of his evident distress of mind; but she saw that her attendance on him would leave her little time for the search which had been her chief object in coming to Greyburgh, and that she must each day make use of the few hours when she would not be with Reginald for that purpose, or she would have little chance of success, so far as the lost girl was concerned. Indeed, if anything had been required to make her more earnest in her purpose, it would have been the sight of her brother's young life fleeting away so swiftly into the unknown deep of eternity. Of late she felt the mysteries of death and the unseen had been crowding strangely round her. What if that other soul which had seemed committed to her hands were even now, like Reginald's, trembling on the brink of its eternal destiny? Surely there is no time in this swift, sudden life, with its startling changes and its temporary power over that which is to come, to sit down and weep for the dying or the dead. In the future the dead is the true existence. There are the generations gathered of all that ever breathed one and all to God, whether for weal or woe!

yet abiding in the flesh on earth are but as a handful to that mighty multitude, like the gleanings left upon the vines when the vintage is over, like the autumn leaves lingering on the boughs when the summer wealth has passed away. Soon the rushing wings of time shall sweep them on to join their fellows in the unchangeable and everlasting state. What does aught signify for them, save the seal wherewith their brief probation shall stamp them for that enduring being,—whether reflecting the image of Christ, till the radiance of the Morning Star has been caught in the dim waters of their soul, they pass into the unimagined glory of His presence; or blackening into the likeness of a nature fallen below humanity, they go out to the desolation of that darkness which is exile from Him? This alone is matter of import to any who yet breathe the atmosphere of earth; and is it then a time to waste the hours in mourning for those whose little day has hastened to its close a few short moments, as it were, swifter than the rest? Oh! to stay the ultimate perishing of souls! to prevent the eternal death, the irremediable destruction,—surely this is the only worthy end, the only momentous object, to which time and thought and life and energy should be given, while we walk our brief course to the grave!

So at least thought Ernestine Courtenay, as, resisting the impulse to relieve her heavy heart with unavailing tears, she roused herself at once to action on behalf of Annie Brook. The first step to be taken in so wide a search cost her no little thought; finally, she decided on applying to the only person she knew at Greyburgh who would be likely to assist her. One of the largest parishes in the town was under the care of a certain Dr.

Granby, who, with his wife, had some time previously spent a few days at a country house where Ernestine was visiting. There had been a large party assembled, Hugh Lingard among others, and various of Ernestine's intimate friends, so that she had but a dim recollection of the rector of St. Gregory's and his wife, whom she had never met before. She remembered, however, that they had been exceedingly marked in their attentions to her, and had warmly invited her to visit them if she ever came to Greyburgh; and she thought it very possible that Dr. Granby might be able, among the poor of his own large parish, to find some clew to the lost girl she was seeking.

Having left Mrs. Tompson lionizing Greyburgh in the manner she thought most aristocratic, by assuring the guide that the colleges were poor indeed compared to the buildings she had seen abroad, Ernestine therefore started off to enlist Dr. Granby in her service. She passed through the whole extent of St. Gregory's parish, and found that he did not live anywhere near it, but in a villa some little distance from the town. Entering through an iron gate, with two ambitious-looking griffins perched in painful attitudes on the side-posts, she passed up a gravel walk to the house, in front of which was a well-kept lawn. Here two young ladies were engaged in playing croquet, dressed in the most improved costume for that amusement, with impertinent little hats perched on a mass of hair, dresses looped up over full-blown crinolines, like sails reefed for a gale of wind, and high-heeled boots, which were not alone visible under their very short petticoats. A weak-looking curate and a vivacious undergraduate shared in their game, and Ernestine passed into the well-furnished

drawing-room, preceded by a footman in livery, where Mrs. Granby, rustling in the stiffest of silks, rose to receive her. A foreboding took possession of her that this was not an abode where lost or wandering outcasts were likely to be known.

Mrs. Granby received her with the greatest *empressement*, and had very soon informed herself anxiously of the health of every one of Ernestine's relations whose name had a place in the peerage. Ernestine inquired for Dr. Granby.

"He is well, and will be so delighted to see you," and Mrs. Granby, ringing the bell, desired that Dr. Granby and the young ladies might be told of Miss Courtenay's visit. Ernestine would thankfully have dispensed with the young ladies, who forthwith arrived through the window, accompanied by the mild curate and the fast undergraduate. More slowly, it may even be said majestically, the rector approached, a large, heavy man, conveying irresistibly the impression of a lifetime of excellent dinners, with a smooth face, a shining bald head, a good-tempered expression, and an elaborately courteous manner. He was profuse in his delight at seeing Miss Courtenay, and the list of titled relations was gone over again; then the conversation turned on the news of the day, with an occasional question from the Misses Granby on the prospects of the London season, and Ernestine saw that her only hope was to ask the polite rector for a private interview when he went with her to the door. Making her visit very short, therefore, she soon found herself passing through the hall with Dr. Granby.

"Can I speak to you for a moment alone, Dr. Granby?" she said, hastily, as she saw the footman proceed-

ing to open the door. "I want to ask your help in a matter of some difficulty to me."

"Undoubtedly, my dear Miss Courtenay, I shall be most happy if I can be of any assistance to you. Allow me," and opening the door of a luxuriously-furnished study, he ushered her in, placed a seat for her, and sat down himself in a huge easy-chair, which seemed to enshrine his portly form with the most sympathetic softness. Taking out his white cambric pocket-handkerchief, as if in readiness for any emotion that might arise, he bent forward in an attitude of polite attention, his bald head shining in the sunlight, and his gold-rimmed spectacles beaming with a mild effulgence as he turned them inquiringly on his visitor. Ernestine felt as if she could more easily have faced a colonel of dragoons than this bland ecclesiastic, who looked, in his irreproachable costume and perfect *bien être*, as if he could never have even heard of such a thing as misery or sin; but there was no help for it, so with a sort of desperation she plunged into her subject.

"Dr. Granby, I came to Greyburgh chiefly to try and find a poor young girl, in whom I am much interested, and I do not at all know where to look for her. I have thought that among the poor of your large parish you might be able to find some clew to her."

"It would depend on any circumstance having brought her under my notice," said the rector. "Do you suppose she might be one of the pupil teachers at the school, or among the young persons preparing for a confirmation to be held in this church—I mean, in my church—on the twenty-sixth of next month, by the lord bishop of the diocese?"

"Oh, no!" said Ernestine, coloring painfully; "she

is not good, not respectable. She was taken from her father's house by a man—I believe he calls himself a gentleman—who has left her, I fear, to utter ruin." The rector of St. Gregory's drew in his lips in a manner which caused him to give an involuntary whistle, while the gold-rimmed spectacles rapidly mounted up his round forehead, in consequence of the elevation of his eyebrows.

"My dear Miss Courtenay, *if* you are quite aware of the style of person you have described, you cannot possibly suppose I could know her. Of course I have intercourse with none but respectable characters."

"But you seek out the lost and erring among your people to try and reclaim them, do you not?" said Ernestine, raising her clear eyes to his face.

"Ahem! within proper limits, certainly; wherever there appears any reasonable hope of my ministrations being successful, and where there is no risk of my sacred person—I mean my sacred office—being treated with irreverence; but disreputable creatures, such as the individual you mention, may be said to be sunk beneath the level of reclaimable humanity. It would be most incongruous that I should seek them out, or permit of their approaching me."

"But I do not believe this case to be beyond hope," said Ernestine eagerly; "at least there is the possibility of trying what can be done for her. I only want to find her. I hoped you might have helped me in this, and as it would not be well for her to come to me at the hotel, I thought I might have met her here."

"In my house!" shrieked the rector. "My—dear Miss Courtenay," he added, making a descent upon the affectionate term to save himself from an exclamation

of a different description, which had nearly escaped him. "Impossible; utterly impossible. Pray, consider what is due to myself, my position,—Mrs. Granby,—my daughters. Why, only conceive, those sweet girls might actually see that wretched creature when they are taking their healthful exercise on the lawn! It is wholly out of the question that I should permit such a thing; and allow me to suggest, Miss Courtenay, with all due deference, that you are really making a mistake—a sad mistake, I may say—in allowing yourself to be occupied, in the smallest degree, about an individual of whose very existence, with that of all her class, you should properly be supposed to be ignorant."

"But the fact of her existence has been forced upon me in a way I cannot escape, Dr. Granby, even if I wished it, and with that also the certainty that she has an immortal soul, which is but too likely to perish forever, if no one will even try to save her."

"Yes, I suppose—doubtless she has a soul," said Dr. Granby, as if giving a reluctant assent to a logical fact; "but it cannot be your concern, Miss Courtenay. Felons and murderers have souls, but you would not wish to interfere with their damnation—I mean, with their salvation—would you?" Ernestine thought she should be only too glad if she could get the chance of trying. "No, no," continued the rector, "we must leave these things to the proper authorities."

"But who are the proper authorities in this case, Dr. Granby?" said Ernestine, looking up quietly into his face. He shifted about uneasily in his chair.

"Why, the—the Board of Guardians, or the Church Penitentiary Association, or, stay," he added, brightening up, "did you not say the girl had a father?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then he is the proper authority," exclaimed Dr. Granby, cutting her short triumphantly. "Let him be informed of his daughter's disreputable proceedings, and let no one else interfere, far less a lady of your age and station in life, Miss Courtenay."

Ernestine saw she need not waste any more time with the rector of St. Gregory, and she rose to go. Dr. Granby rose with alacrity also, but as she held out her hand to take leave, he took it in both his own in the most paternal manner, and proceeded to expound a few more of his sentiments :

"I trust I need not assure you, my dear Miss Courtenay, that although I have permitted myself to give you a little advice, becoming, I may say, to my pastoral office and my friendly feeling toward yourself, I have no desire whatever to discourage your amiable philanthropy. Far from it. I only wish to direct your too ardent, too liberal zeal into proper channels. My own daughters engage, at my desire, in works of charity, piety, and necessity. My sweet Louisa visits the infant school once a week, and it is most cheering to see how she has taught the innocent little ones to clap their hands in unison; while Maria, who is strikingly talented, and has a powerful voice, always leads our little choir in Term time, when several of the collegians assist at our services, and can appreciate our musical efforts. In works such as these, my dear Miss Courtenay, let me advise you to exercise your benevolent disposition, and you will find yourself benefiting your fellow-creatures without departing from the station in which Providence has placed you, and the usages of that society which you are so well fitted to adorn." He finished off with

a low bow and a wave of the white pocket-handkerchief, as if it had been a flag of truce; and Ernestine, quietly wishing him good morning, without attempting any further reply, left the house.

"And this man," she thought, as she walked away—"this man is the representative and messenger of Him who came to seek and save the lost,—who took upon Him the form of a servant, who had not where to lay His head, who sat with publicans and sinners, who suffered the sinful woman to wash his feet with her tears and wipe them with the hairs of her head!" Then she began to think of the clergyman of the church to which Lady Beaufort had always taken her in London, and she felt that his opinion of her mission to Annie Brook would be very much the same as Dr. Granby's, and she wondered how it was that it had never before struck her, these were strange interpreters of the gospel that was to be preached to the poor and needy—the gospel of that Immaculate Love who came "to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and to set at liberty them that are bruised." The fact was, that Ernestine was now, unknown to herself, touching on the outskirts of the deep comprehensive truth—the lack of which had caused Lingard to make shipwreck of his faith—contained in these words, "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God;"—a truth underlying the very foundations of all real religion, and without which the loftiest creed, the fairest theories are, and ever shall be, hollow and lifeless. The one impulse of loving pity, of active, unselfish charity, which had led her into this search for a lost sinner, was doing more to teach her the knowledge of God and the

truth of God, and the real nature of that atonement once made for the sins of the world, than all the theological instruction she had received from external sources in the whole course of her life.

Meantime, however, she went on to her hotel greatly disheartened. She was quite at a loss what to do next in her endeavor to find Annie Brook; but the very fact that all to whom she so much as mentioned the unhappy girl seemed straightway to harden their hearts against her, made her the more determined that she would never cease her efforts on her behalf, cost what it might.

Dinner with Mrs. Thompson was not enlivening. This aristocratically-minded lady, having completed her survey of the colleges for the day, was of opinion that Greyburgh was a very poor place, indeed, dull and unfashionable. Why, it was nothing compared even to such towns as Bath or Leamington; there, one could at least find tolerable shops, and it was possible to meet one's friends on the parades; but the principal street of Greyburgh, which the guide pretended was worth seeing, why, really it was no promenade at all. There was hardly an elegant toilet to be seen. Perhaps if Mrs. Thompson had owned all the truth, she would have admitted that the most lady-like person she had observed, in her opinion, was a certain Don sailing down the street in his scarlet gown.

Ernestine went back early in the evening to her brother. She found him asleep. The nurse thought either that his composing-draught had been more potent than usual, or that Ernestine's visit in the morning had soothed him to a certain extent, as he seldom slept so long or so quietly. Ernestine stood looking at him in

silence for some moments. It was a sleep so like to death! He lay perfectly motionless, the marble whiteness of his face brought out in strong relief, by the heavy masses of dark hair that hung round it, and the black eyelashes lying without a quiver on his wan cheek. She could almost have believed, as she gazed on him, that the mighty change had passed over him, and that his closed eyes had already looked into the tremendous mysteries which all the generations that have ever lived have sought in vain to penetrate on this side of the grave; his lips seemed locked in that inexorable silence which has ever baffled the living, and held back from them the knowledge that endues with awful wisdom each little babe that has sighed its feeble breath away ere well it has learned to live; while each line of the exhausted form seemed to imply that it only waited now to sink into the earth, with the cold insensibility to all that is most repugnant to it, which so surely marks the lifeless clay. If it were so—then were the ultimate state of that pale sleeper fixed irrevocably—the soul stamped with the seal that through the incomprehensible Forever was to define unchangingly the conditions of his being. But, no! that faint, scarce perceptible heaving of the breast, that little tremor of breath moving over the white lips, was the barrier, immovable as the laws which guide the stars in their courses, that shut from him the teeming immensity of the unseen, and held him bound to this visible life of brief probation. How frail a barrier! How tremendous the step beyond! Yet not one faint gleam of the coming revelation dawned with ever so pale a light upon those living eyes; that and that alone which he had made himself in his twenty little years of tran-

sient existence, he still must be till the last faint sigh of that gasping breath goes forth, and then—God face to face! all mystery, all doubt, all shadow destroyed in the light of His presence—the illimitable universe disclosed—death and the world behind him—infinity above, below, around—and immortality, fixed in the mould which he himself prepared for it in the life of earth, settling down upon his being in its changeless power. Long did Ernestine stand watching him, as she thought on these things; but at last, with a sigh of disquietude and unrest, she turned away to seek some change from thoughts that seemed too weighty for her soul.

Nurse Berry had taken her knitting into the other room, where the waning light still lingered, and sat near the open door, so that she might perceive at once if her patient awoke. Ernestine went and sat down on a low stool at her side, looking up with a sense of rest into the kind motherly face, and listened gratefully to the homely tones which asked if she had had “a good time” out of doors. The necessity for independent action, and for an unwonted degree of exposure to the rough ways of the world, had given Ernestine that longing for some sort of loving protection and shelter which usually overtakes a woman thus situated, and she felt as if she should have liked to lay down her red head on the good woman’s lap, as she used to do when her own old nurse still lived to make her childhood safe and happy.

“Indeed, I have not had a good time at all,” she said, “for I have been very much disappointed.”

“And how was that, my dear lady?”

It occurred to Ernestine that it was possible the

nurse might be able to advise her how to proceed in the task that seemed to grow every hour more difficult. Looking up eagerly, she said :

"I was disappointed because I could get no help where I hoped for it; but, nurse, now I think of it, perhaps you yourself could help me?"

"I shall be very pleased, ma'am," said the nurse, smiling down upon the sweet eyes which had quite won her heart already; "what be I to do?"

"I will tell you," said Ernestine. "I want so much to find a poor young girl, who has been deserted in Greyburgh, and I do not know in the least where to find her."

"Is she one of them unfortunates?" said the nurse, making use of the technical phrase, which to the more inexperienced of that unhappy class has too often afforded a palliation for undeniable sin.

"Yes, unfortunate indeed; because she is so guilty," said Ernestine.

"Ah! there be a many such in this here place," said the nurse, shaking her head sadly. "It often gives me a sore heart to see young things, no better than children, starting in their gay dresses of a winter night; but, ma'am, if you'll excuse me for saying it, bad as they are, I do think those university gentlemen that encourage them are worse. They ought to know better, with their learning, and their money, and their fine manners. It do seem a shocking thing that they should go ruining simple young girls, body and soul, just for their own wicked pleasure."

"It is shocking beyond all words, nurse; you cannot think worse of these men than I do."

"And to see how grand and proud they hold them-

selves all the time, counting even respectable poor people as dust under their feet; and as to the poor girls they ruin—why, when once they've cast them off, they'd dare them so much as to look near them, or make game of them for being what they've made them! I remember a poor child I knew about—she was but fourteen—a pretty, modest little maid, and she was servant at a lodging-house, where one of these fine college gentlemen had rooms. Well, he set himself to ruin her, and she too young and silly to know what she was about. So, when it was found out, she was turned off from her place at once, though they kept the fine gentleman in his rooms. She went home to her mother, but her stepfather shut the door in her face, and would not suffer her mother so much as to know what became of her. She wandered about starving for a few days, and then one of these wicked women who keep disreputable lodging-houses in the town got hold of her, and drove her out on the streets to get her bread by wickedness. Well, ma'am, one evening I was walking down the street, and I saw her coming along—looking so childish and simple, even in her flaunting dress—and I saw her meet this gentleman. She had not seen him since she had got turned out of doors for his sake. She stood stock-still, grew white as death, and then gazed up in his face with such a beseeching look; as if she wanted him to save her out of the life he had brought her to. He just half stopped for a moment, and looked at her from head to foot, and then burst out into such a wicked, mocking laugh—I think the devil himself must have taught it to him—and said in a jeering tone: 'So that's what you have come to, is it?' He pointed her out to the gentleman he was walking

with, and then pushed past her; and they went down the street together laughing and sneering. The child looked after them for a moment, and then dashed up her hands, and began running as fast as she could toward the bridge. I was afraid she might mean to do as too many of them does; and perhaps she did mean it, and was scared when she saw the water; but, when I got up to her as fast as I could, she was standing at the parapet, leaning her face down on the stone, and beating her hands against it as if she wanted to hurt them. I put my arm round her, and said: 'What is it, my dear?' and she seemed as if she must tell out her trouble, though she never saw me in her life before; for she cried out, 'O ma'am! I met him, and he laughed at me! He laughed at me for being what I am; and who but he brought me to it—who but he brought me to it?'"

"And what became of the poor thing?" said Ernestine, with tears in her eyes.

"A clergyman I knew got her into a penitentiary, when I told him about her, and she is burying her days there still, and she not sixteen yet."

"It is too dreadful," said Ernestine; "how it makes one think of the great God looking down on such deeds!"

"Ah! that's true, ma'am! I think of that many a time; we shall know the rights of these things when we go to stand before Him;" and involuntarily Ernestine shuddered. "But about this girl you want to find, ma'am; do you know her name?"

"Yes; her name is Annie Brook. I know that much, and no more. I have never even seen her."

"Indeed. Then I fear it won't be easy for you to

find her among so many; but I'll tell you what to do, ma'am: you ask Mr. Thorold to help you, and he'll find her for you if any one can."

"And who is Mr. Thorold?"

"The clergyman who got the poor child I told you of into the penitentiary. He is sure to find her out if she is in the town. He is always among thieves and lost women."

"Always among thieves?" said Ernestine, looking up surprised.

"Yes, to try and do them good. He is at it night and day, in all the most blackguard places in the town. I said to him once—for you see, ma'am, I nursed him through a fever he caught from a poor beggar who died of it, so I makes free with him—I said I did wonder he spent himself among these awful bad characters, that seemed as if nothing could make them any better—convicts, and drunkards, and tramps going to jail with canvas bags on."

"With canvas bags on!" said Ernestine, looking bewildered.

"Yes, ma'am. When they tear up their rags in the work'us to get new ones, the master just cuts a hole in a sack, and puts their heads through it, and they are sent off to prison in it. Well, it is these, and others like them, both men and women, that Mr. Thorold is always trying to teach and to help; and when I said to him I thought there was such little chance of ever getting one of them out of their bad ways, it seemed a pity he should wear himself out on them, he said, says he: 'That's the very reason why I do it, nurse. Every one else has given them up, and I like to be the friend

of those who have got no other in this world. People say they are hopeless characters, and there is nothing more to be done for them but to leave them to take their own course to hell; but you may depend on it,' says he, 'that's not the way the Father in heaven deals with us. He never gives any one up, be they ever so bad, to the very last moment of their lives; there is never a soul so lost or so dead but His grace can reach it; nor a heart so cold in despair but His pity can comfort it.'"

"Oh, I like that!" exclaimed Ernestine, her eyes kindling.

"Ah, I have thought of his words many times," said the nurse, "when I have heard folks talking of those they thought hardened in vice."

"And you think Mr. Thorold would help me?"

"He'd be more than glad, ma'am; it is just meat and drink to him to help those that are friendless and lost, like the girl you are looking for."

"And how can I see him?"

"Well, if you did not mind, you might see him now; for I know where he is at this hour. He holds a night-school for boys down a lane not far from here; and he would speak to you there in a moment, if you liked to go. My daughter is down stairs waiting for me, and she shall show you the way if you like."

"Do you think I might? Is it not too late?" said Ernestine, looking doubtfully at the window, where the shades of evening were gathering, though it was by no means dark.

"Well, ma'am, that's as you think. As for Mr. Thorold, he never thinks what hour it is. I don't believe he knows day from night, for he seems to me

always at work; he is as often as not up at night with the dying, and I am sure he never rests by day."

"While I am letting some wretched fear of infringing conventionalities stand in the way of saving a soul!" thought Ernestine. "I will go at once," she said, starting up. "I hope my brother will not wake till I return."

"I don't think he will, ma'am," said the nurse; "he is very still, poor lamb."

And in another moment Ernestine found herself traversing some small narrow streets, with old-fashioned houses rising on either side, which grew more and more crowded with wretched-looking people, till she reached a parish school-house. This building, her guide told her, was lent to Mr. Thorold every evening for his "wild boys;" and wild enough they certainly seemed, as the open door of a large room revealed a throng of such street Arabs as had never met her eyes before. Uncombed and unwashed, they seemed to Ernestine the most absolutely hopeless of possible recipients of learning; yet all were busy under the superintendence of Mr. Thorold, who came forward at once after receiving a whispered communication from the nurse's daughter. He was a tall man, apparently about five and thirty, wearing a rough great-coat which had seen its best days, with bushy black hair pushed carelessly back from his forehead, strongly-marked eyebrows, which almost hid his keen dark eyes, a sallow complexion, and an expression of great firmness and determination. Ernestine was both surprised and pleased to see that it was a young man in an undergraduate's gown whom he called to take his place while he left the room; her impression of the younger university men had not been

such as to lead her to expect any of them to take an interest in a night-school for ragged boys.

Mr. Thorold came up to her, and bowing, without a word, he opened the door of a small room which was unoccupied, and placed a chair for her. He did not sit down himself, but stood leaning against the wall, waiting for her to speak. Ernestine remembered her interview with Dr. Granby, and thought that never in her life had she seen a greater contrast than between those two ecclesiastics; but she felt no difficulty in stating her wishes to this business-like cleric. He heard her to the end, then asked a few rapid questions as to the extent of her knowledge of the girl, with the somewhat brusque manner which seemed habitual to him; and after a moment's thought, said decisively:

"I believe your only chance of finding her is in the jail." Ernestine gave a start of surprise. "Does that alarm you?" he said, a smile lighting up his dark face.

"Not for myself; but I have no reason to think Annie Brook dishonest, or anything of that sort."

"That has nothing to do with it," he said quickly. "There is a peculiar sort of police discipline in this place, which enables the college authorities to commit women of this unhappy class to jail for certain short periods. We have that much of real Christianity in the universities, that the deadly crime which the law does not recognize as such at all is at least punishable here."

"And do you think it does these miserable women any good to be sent to prison?" asked Ernestine.

"Not as a punishment; the periods for which they are imprisoned are too short, and no care is taken to

make it morally beneficial to them; they are all herded together, with every incitement to try and emulate one another in recklessness and bravado. But it is of incalculable use, as being the one only opportunity which their lives afford of bringing good influences to bear upon them, and offering them the means of reformation, if they can be induced to accept them. They are so guarded by the wretches who keep the houses where they congregate, that it is next to impossible to gain a hearing from them outside, but in the jail they cannot escape; they must see the chaplain, or any one else who may try to benefit them; and this imprisonment has been the means of saving many."

"One would think it ought to save all," said Ernestine eagerly. "Surely when they are actually there, in the very hands of those who would help them, not one should be allowed to go back to their dreadful life."

Mr. Thorold shook his head. "You little know the trammels that bind them, and besides, it is not easy to find persons who have both the will and the capacity for such a mission as that. It has been found that the chaplain alone cannot do it, for many reasons. It requires the help of a woman, at once wise and gentle, and there is no lady at present who is able to undertake it."

"And are there many imprisoned?"

"In Term time there are often from twenty to thirty. I only wish," he added, clinching his hand, "that the university police would administer a somewhat more even justice, and imprison the men, who are a hundred-fold more guilty than these wretched women."

"I am very glad to hear you say so," said Ernestine, "for I cannot understand the received code of opinion on that subject at all. You think, then, that I may find Annie Brook in the prison?"

"It is possible,—in any case, you are likely to get some clew to her. You say you have a portrait of her; I advise you to take it with you, and show it to the governor of the jail; it is very possible he may recognize it; if not, ask him to show it to the women at present imprisoned there, and if he is careful not to say for what purpose he does so, they will be sure at least to betray the name by which she goes at present; these girls scarcely ever retain their own name."

"But would they not be glad to tell all they knew of her to those who wished to help her?"

"Not if they thought there was any intention of persuading her to reform."

"How very strange! I should have thought that, however lost and wretched they might be, they would retain enough of humanity to be glad that a companion should be saved out of misery like their own."

"I fear it is a principle of human nature to feel it a relief to have companions in guilt, and to dread repentance in others, lest it awaken personal uneasiness of conscience. But there is a stronger motive in the case of these poor girls: the good people who have established 'Refuges' and 'Homes' for those who repent, have succeeded in making them so repellent and intolerable to them, that I believe they consider themselves to be performing an act of common humanity when they try to prevent any from being persuaded to enter them."

At this moment a considerable degree of noise was

heard from the next room, and Mr. Thorold went hurriedly to the door.

"My populace is becoming clamorous," he said; "I must go."

"But pray tell me," said Ernestine, "how am I to gain admission to the jail?"

"You must have an order from a magistrate. I will get one for you, if you will tell me your name."

"You do not know my name?" said Ernestine, looking up with a smile of amusement.

"How should I?"

"True; I was only thinking how surprised my aunt, who regulates most of my proceedings, would be if she knew I had been talking to you as I have done, without your so much as knowing my name."

He shrugged his shoulders. "These abstruse etiquettes of society are quite beyond me—I cannot away with them. Life is too short and too solemn to be clogged with such trammels as these. If you want to save a soul, and I am willing to help you, what can it signify to me whether you are a duchess or a dairymaid, or to you who I am, if you have reason to believe I am neither a ruffian nor an impostor?"

"I quite agree with you," said Ernestine, laughing; "and my aunt is not here to argue the point with you. My name is Ernestine Courtenay; and I am so much obliged to you for your kindness," she added, with her winning sweetness of tone and manner. He smiled as he looked keenly and searchingly at her for a moment, and then, having arranged that he was to bring the order to her brother's rooms next day, he opened the door for her, and she passed out into the dark streets, with her guide.

CHAPTER XIII.

REGINALD.

REGINALD still lay in his deathlike sleep. Ernestine had decided to watch by him herself, at least for this night, that she might judge of his state more fully; and Mrs. Berry, after hearing, with great satisfaction, that Mr. Thorold had proved quite as helpful as she had prophesied, took her leave, promising to return early in the morning. Ernestine sat down by her brother's side, feeling that she could with a free heart give him her undivided attention, now that a hopeful step had at last been taken on behalf of Annie Brook. But while he slept, her thoughts flew away to the one who was dearer to her than even the dying brother, or than all the world beside—the one to whom she had given the love that can be felt but once in a lifetime, and which it is a terrible thing to feel on this earth at all; for the exceeding preciousness with which it invests one perishable human being, to whom each day brings the chance of sickness and death, sorrow and danger, makes such a love an agony rather than a blessing. They who so love must ever drink deeply of the cup of trembling; but at times there will arise in their hearts a nameless terror, a sickening anxiety for the future, whose brightness all depends on this one cherished treasure, which often proves a foreboding of some real

anguish looming in the distant hours. It was so on this night with Ernestine Courtenay. She did not wonder that, in the darkness of the quiet sick-room, her heart seemed to go out to Hugh Lingard with a tenderness almost mournful in its depth; it was often so when she was parted from him, but on this occasion she was oppressed by a vague yet most painful feeling that she had somehow separated herself from him to a certain degree—that she had begun to raise a barrier between them which would ultimately shut him out from her forever. She argued with herself on the unreasonableness of such shadowy fears. It was with his full consent that she had come to Greyburgh. She was going to write to him the next day, as she had promised, with a detail of all she had done as yet in her mission. The very last words they had said to each other had been to arrange that their marriage should take place in the course of a few months. Yet, do what she would, her spirits sunk under the weight of an undefined conviction that she had entered on a path which, by some means, would lead her far away from the one being to whom she clung with all a woman's passionate devotion.

She was roused from her dark thoughts by Reginald, who suddenly started out of his heavy sleep with a cry of indescribable terror. He flung out his arms, beating the air with his helpless hands, while his large black eyes opened to their fullest extent, and gazed into the darkness with a vacant stare.

"Not yet—not yet," he shrieked out. "No! I cannot go—I cannot. Help, O help me!"

In a moment Ernestine was kneeling at his side with her arms clasped round him. "Reginald, darling, what

is it? There is no one here but me, Ernestine, your sister. Look at me, dearest; don't be afraid."

His hands fell on her shoulders, the wildness passed from his eyes, and he looked down at her with returning consciousness; but she could feel his whole frame trembling from head to foot. "Ernie," he said, in a hoarse whisper, "is the dreadful hour come? Must I go? Is this death?" and he literally shuddered.

"No, my darling," she said soothingly, "you are only faint; let me give you some wine; you will be better presently."

She made him swallow some wine, and then bathed his hands and temples with eau de cologne, till gradually the spasm of terror passed from his blanched face, and, falling back in his chair, he gave a heavy sigh, half of relief and half of remembered agony.

"Then it is still to come?" he murmured. "Almost I could wish that first bitterness of death at least were past; yet no," he continued, his features contracting with pain, "anything—anything rather than that; better life, though it be torture, than the blackness of eternal night."

It was on Ernestine's lips to ask why death was so dreadful to him. It was not so to her, though the love that brightened earth for her might make her sad to leave it yet awhile; and why should this boy, who once had loved to lose himself in glowing dreams of the consummation of bliss, now so shrink from that which was but the gate of immortality? But she remembered her promise to ask no questions, and, besides, he was still too much agitated to risk further disturbance, so she soothed him gently for a time, talking to him on indifferent subjects till gradually he became calm, and

his eyes brightened as he turned them on her sweet face.

"You are a good nurse my darling Ernie," he said. "I feel now as if I could almost enjoy this night, with you sitting at my side. Your voice is just like music."

"I am so glad you are more comfortable," she said, laying her head on the pillow beside him. "We shall have such a nice quiet time. Now, you must tell me what you would like to talk about."

"Shall I really?" he said caressingly. "May I choose the subject?"

"Of course. What am I here for but to be your slave?"

"Well, you remember how you used to tell me stories long ago, when we were children, though I used to consider you almost a grown-up lady, because you were four years older. I want you to do the same for me to-night. I want you to tell me all the histories you can remember of those who have gone to death calmly and fearlessly, though they had been compelled to face it in all its horrible certainty for some time previously."

"What! beginning with Socrates and his poison-cup?"

"If you will; and tell me about that criminal, I forget his name, who, on the scaffold, thought neither of the shame nor the agony, but said only, 'Now I shall learn the great secret.'"

"And Julian the Apostate, who died saying, 'O Galilean, thou hast conquered,'" said Ernestine, lifting her head that she might look into her brother's eyes as she spoke.

A sudden flush dyed his pale face. "As you please," he answered shortly, and then went on: "Who was it

that said, 'Death cannot be an evil, because it is universal'?"

"That was Goethe. But, darling," said Ernestine softly, "would it not be happiest of all to speak of the only true Conqueror over death—the One who took its sting away, and made the grave no strange place for any one of us since *He* has lain in it?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Reginald, starting up with a vehemence which seemed greater than his feeble frame could bear. "Ernie, do not speak to me of Him. I cannot bear it—I cannot. I tell you I will not. You will kill me if you speak of Him; rather go and leave me quite alone."

"My dearest Reggie, I will not touch on any subject you do not like. Lie down again, and trust me I will only tell you what you ask, the histories, so far as I remember them, of brave men dying calmly and without fear;" and in a low gentle tone, as she would have soothed a wearied child, she spoke to him of those who had been seen to go down with fearless steps into the valley of the shadow of death; and of others who, being rescued from it, had spoken of a lovely pure light into which they seemed to sink, with echoes of softest music in their ears; and Reginald listened with her hand clasped in his, and grew very calm and still; and so the night wore peacefully on for both, till the faint glimmer of the far-off dawn stole into the sky, and the cool breath of the morning passed lightly over the wearied eyelids of the dying man, while, half sleeping, half waking, he lay gazing dreamily out upon the shifting shadows of the heavens. Then Ernestine relapsed into silence, and, with her head still laid beside her brother's, followed unconsciously the train of thought which that strange

unearthly night suggested to her. The actual life of the present seemed so untangible, so fleeting, with all its briefness and uncertainty, that she felt as if no soul could ever seek in it to slake its thirst for joy and for existence, and in spirit she passed over the dark valley of which she had been speaking, into the realms of changeless light, where there is no shadow, no perplexity, no fear; and she thought what glorious bliss, what sweetest rest, it would be to dwell in that deathless land with him, her dearest loved,—with this poor wayward brother also, and with that other one for whom her heart still yearned,—gathered all together at the feet of Infinite Compassion. And so she lost herself in those sweet visions, till, with a smile, she woke to see that what appeared to her but the baseless fancies of her own deep longing, was, after all, the very reality which God has prepared for those that love Him.

At last the first sunbeam smote on the wan face of Reginald, and another day had begun for him who had so few to number now, and soon all unearthly thoughts were put to flight by both of them by the arrival of Nurse Berry, with all her homely arrangements for their comfort. She insisted especially that Ernestine should now go to the hotel to take a few hours' rest, and Reginald urged her to do so, with many loving thanks for the comfort she had been to him that night; so that she agreed to their wishes, promising to return in the course of the afternoon.

When Ernestine woke up later in the day from her needful rest, she found Mrs. Tompson in a state of considerable excitement. Dr. and Mrs. Granby had come to call on Miss Courtenay, and, finding that she could not be disturbed, had paid their visit to the chaperon.

In the course of it they dropped various mysterious hints, that they feared Miss Courtenay's charitable zeal was carrying her beyond the *convenances* of society, and that they wished much she would place herself under their protection and guidance during her stay in a place where reticence of all sorts was so much required as in Greyburgh. These remarks Mrs. Tompson repeated with much unction, beseeching Ernestine to take them into serious consideration; but she, inwardly shuddering at the thought of placing herself under Dr. Granby's care, and of the aristocratic uselessness which would be the result, assured Mrs. Tompson she was quite satisfied with her chaperonage; and added, that in Reginald's precarious state she did not intend to see the Granbys, or any other acquaintance at all. She begged her chaperon, however, to accept all Mrs. Granby's invitations to dinner, etc., for herself, and finally reminding her that there was only one person to whom she owed any account of her actions, she pointed to the letter ready sealed for the post, which lay on the table, addressed to Mr. Lingard, and assured her it contained a detail of all her proceedings since she left him. With this Mrs. Tompson was fain to be content, and Ernestine hurried back as soon as she could to Reginald, for her uneasiness with regard to his mental condition increased every hour, and her great fear now was lest he should die with this dark burden, whatever it might be, unrevealed and unrelieved.

She had not long been in her place by his side when the nurse came to tell her that Mr. Thorold was waiting for her in the next room. She went in and found him walking up and down, somewhat after the fashion of a wild beast in a cage; but he turned to meet Ernestine

with a frankness and simplicity which set her at ease at once.

"I have brought your order," he said, "and I have persuaded the magistrate to give you one containing a general permission to visit the female prisoners, as it would not have answered your purpose to have it made out to any person in particular. I have had to fight a small battle on your behalf," he added, with a smile; "the conscientious magistrate would not grant you the order till he could satisfy himself that you had no intention of teaching these poor women Popery or Puritanism, or various other distinctive forms of religion which he enumerated. I told him I knew little of you, but a great deal of the wretched prisoners; and that, while I had no reason to suppose the study of doctrinal theology formed any part of your intentions toward them, I was so certain that they, for the most part, did not realize the existence of a God or a future state, that I doubted its taking any serious effect on them if you did."

"But do you mean that he would actually have refused me entrance to the jail on such a ground as that? I could understand a fear of erroneous doctrine being introduced into the minds of high-principled, well-educated persons, but, surely, in the case of women living, as you say, in utter ignorance of the very foundations of religion, and in gross violation of the plainest laws of God, it is not possible that he would let them miss any practical good I might be able to do them for so chimerical a fear?"

"It is not only possible," said Thorold, "but it is this same senseless fear which has shut the doors of our jails and workhouses all over the country to the only

persons who would care to try and help the unhappy inmates ; it would be inconceivable if it were not true ; but the pig-headedness of British magistrates and guardians of the poor is something wonderful !” He said this with such hearty vehemence, that Ernestine could not help laughing.

“And are the poor convicts and paupers never allowed to see any one, then ?” she asked.

“Oh, yes ! any ill-conditioned, disreputable person of their own rank, who chooses to call himself a friend, is quite welcome, at least in the workhouses, to go and revive all their associations with evil, and their longing to return to former bad habits. I will give you a true case in point, which came under my own notice : A poor girl was dying in one of the most infamous houses in the town. A lady whom she had herself sent for, and who had won her love most completely by her gentle kindness, was very anxious that her last hours should not be spent in a place where she heard and saw nothing but the worst of evil night and day. The only shelter to which she could be removed was the workhouse, and the lady begged her for her soul’s sake to consent to go there. The girl had the usual horror of this last home of the poor, but she could not resist the loving counsels of the first person who had ever told her of a Saviour. She agreed to go, but on the one condition that the lady should promise faithfully to visit her there as often as possible. This she gladly did, never dreaming of any difficulty which could stand in her way, and the poor creature, to whom her pure influence was bringing light and peace, was carried off to the workhouse. The next day she went to see her, and was refused admission at the gate ; the porter roughly telling

her it was the guardians' order that no lady should be admitted. You may imagine her distress, knowing the girl must suppose she had forgotten her promise. The lady had powerful friends, however, and she set them to work to obtain a special order of admission for her, which, after a fortnight of tedious delays, she obtained. She went to the gate, and was told the poor girl had died the day before."

"Oh, how sad!" exclaimed Ernestine.

"Yes, but you have not heard the sting of the story yet. During the whole of that fortnight the wretched woman who kept the house whence the girl had been rescued was allowed to visit her daily, and to amuse her dying hours with such conversation as you have never dreamt of."

"That is indeed inconceivable," said Ernestine; "I could not have believed it."

"You see the lady might have been a High-Church woman or an Evangelical, whereas the woman they admitted was only one of the vilest reprobates that ever disgraced her sex, and slew her thousands and ten thousands of living souls; but this is a subject which makes me rabid, so I must not go on. Here is your order, and you will not teach the prisoners Zuinglianism or Universalism, or any other 'ism,' will you?"

"No, I think not," said Ernestine, laughing; "I don't feel very competent to teach them anything; it will all be very strange to me at the jail; I hope I shall not make any blunders. Is the governor a very fierce individual?"

"He is sharp enough to the prisoners, but he is likely to be very amiable to you, I should think. He is an old man, who has been thirty years a 'servant of the

city,' as he terms it, and is probably the last remaining specimen of a race of jailers that is almost obsolete. He is as different as well can be from the cold, stern, gentlemanlike officials who are to be found in such positions now. He has no pretensions to being a gentleman. He is very talkative; speaks with the broad Greyburgh accent, and gives his views on all subjects with the most uncompromising plainness; but he does his practical duties so well that the authorities cannot find an excuse for considering him superannuated, as they wish."

"And is there a matron for the women?" asked Ernestine.

"His wife, old Mrs. Bolton, acts as such. She has all his roughness without his sound good sense."

"Ernestine, can you come to me for a moment?" said the faint voice of Reginald from the next room. She started up, and begged Mr. Thorold to wait a few minutes, while she hastily obeyed the call. The door stood wide open, so that Thorold could see and hear all that passed. Reginald, it seemed, wished to be moved nearer to the window. He wanted air, he said, and, leaning heavily on Ernestine, he began to walk feebly toward it. But her strength was not equal to the weight of his almost helpless frame, and seeing her begin to totter under it, Thorold started up, and, without a word, lifted Reginald in his strong arms and placed him on the couch near the window. Then, as both brother and sister thanked him, he answered in a low, soft tone, which sounded peculiarly soothing, and proceeded to smooth Reginald's pillows, and make various little arrangements for his comfort with a tenderness which astonished Ernestine, who had thought him

somewhat rough and brusque in manner previously. Reginald looked up with a grateful smile, and as Thorold shook hands with him before leaving the room, began a sentence, "Will you—" then suddenly checked himself and said no more. Thorold took no notice of the half-formed speech, but with a few words of sympathy for his evident illness, made way for the nurse who had just come in, and went into the outer room with Ernestine.

"You have a great sorrow there," he said, in a low tone.

"Oh, you cannot think how great!" replied Ernestine, her eyes filling with tears. "It is not only that he is dying, as you perceive, but it is such a sad passing from this world. He gives me no clew to his state of mind, yet I see that these, his last days, are one long unrest, and I hardly know whether he hates life or dreads death most."

The gravity of Thorold's face deepened almost to sternness. "Were his associates among the reading men or those of the wilder set?" he asked.

"Always among the reading men, till lately. He intended to take holy orders, and gave himself up almost entirely to the study of divinity; but Dr. Compton tells me that he altered very much last term, and led a kind of life I should have thought impossible for Reginald. I never had dreaded the ordinary temptations of this place for him."

"There are intellectual as well as moral dangers in Greyburgh now, and it is more than likely it is to these he has succumbed. But I must not stay. If I can be of use to you in any way, let me know, and I will come at once."

He did not wait for her thanks, but went hurriedly away.

"How do you come to know Thorold, Ernestine?" said Reginald, when she went back to him.

She explained that she had gone to ask his assistance respecting a poor person in whom she was interested.

"And do you know him?" she asked in return.

"Not personally ; but I have often been at his church. He is not an attractive man to most people, but I had, and indeed still have, the greatest admiration for his character. I never knew any one with such indomitable faith, such stern self-denial, and such entire devotion of heart and soul to the one cause in which he believes. Thorold has stood like a rock through all the whirlwinds and storms that have been raging through the university of late, casting men's minds into chaos and making shipwreck of their peace."

"Is he a man of influence here?" asked Ernestine.

"With all who really know him ; but he is excessively quiet and unobtrusive. He lives entirely in and for his work, at which he toils like a slave ; but if ever any one seeks his help in difficulties, of whatever nature, he is ready at once with the most fearless counsels. I have several times been on the point of going to him myself, and then I have thought better, or worse of it. And now, Ernie, I must try to sleep, for I am tired ;" and he lay back with so evident a wish to stop the conversation, that she made no attempt to continue it.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE JAIL.

ERNESTINE COURTENAY stood that same afternoon at the gate of the jail, waiting an answer to her summons. She looked up to the high massive walls which hid the building, and the ponderous door, with its ominous bolts and bars, and the grated loophole through which the turnkey inspected her before he opened it; and she smiled involuntarily as she thought of Lady Beaufort's horror and indignation could she have seen her niece in such a position. Her order at once gained her admission, and, walking through an inclosure laid out as a garden, where a few sickly flowers strove to blossom in the perpetual shade of the high walls, she was ushered into the governor's room. He was seated writing at a table,—a tall, rough-looking old man, with a keen eye, which had scanned her from head to foot before she had been two minutes in his presence. Her appearance seemed to propitiate him, for he very graciously asked her to sit down, and proceeded to read her order. He looked up sharply at her when he had done so.

"This is not a common order," he said. "You don't want to see one of those gals in particular, and you can't be come just to look at the whole lot, as if they were wild beasts in a show; so if you'll just tell me what you're up to, ma'am, we shall get on a deal better and quicker."

"I will gladly. Mr. Thorold told me you would help me in a matter I am anxious about."

"Mr. Thorold advised you to come here, did he? then it's all right. He is a trump, he is; not one of your stuck-up parsons, talking out of a book, as stiff as a poker. Would you like to know what Mr. Thorold did once?" he continued, veering round on his chair so as to face Ernestine. "There was a thundering blackguard here committed for manslaughter; he had hit a publican such a knock on the head that he killed his man then and there. Well, he was just like a devil when we got him in here. He knocked down one of the turnkeys, and squared up at me; only I had the handcuffs on him before he knew where he was, and it took the lot on us to get him into the black-hole."

"The black-hole?" said Ernestine inquiringly.

"That's where we locks them up when they're ram-pagious; 'taint a pleasant place, I can tell you. Well, he was a howling there like a hippopotamus" (it struck Ernestine that a howling hippopotamus was a curiosity in natural history, but she made no comment), "and banging the door as if he'd have had it down; and Mr. Thorold, he had come in to see one of the other prisoners. 'What's that?' says he to me, when he heard the row. I told him. 'Now, Bolton,' says he, 'I'll tell you what: you're going to let me into the black-hole to speak to that man.' 'Lord bless you, sir,' says I, 'you must not think of such a thing; why, he'll fell you like an ox.' 'Not a bit of it,' says he; 'come, you take and open the door for me.' 'Just as you please,' says I, for I could not help liking his pluck; 'but if you once goes in, you'll have to stay there an hour, for I've got to go out, and I can't give the key of the black-hole

to no one.' 'All right,' says he; 'I'll stay.' 'But I must lock you up,' says I. 'Lock me up,' says he; and so I did; and whatever he did to the fellow I can't tell you, but I went back in an hour's time, and the prisoner was sitting on the floor, crying like a baby, and Mr. Thorold was leaning over him, comforting him as tender as might be."

"I am very glad you have told me that, Mr. Bolton," said Ernestine, "for I like to think there are such people in the world."

"There's not too many of them," said the jailer, nodding his head sententiously. "Well now, your business, ma'am?"

"It is just this: I want to find a young girl who has gone astray in Greyburgh. Her name is Annie Brook. I have never seen her, but I have her picture; and Mr. Thorold said that even if she were not among the prisoners here, you, or some of the women, might recognize it."

"It's very likely; let's have a look at it."

Ernestine gave him the sketch of the pretty smiling face, with the waving hair and the wreath of flowers. The old man looked at it long and earnestly.

"I have seen this face," he said at last; "but not in here. I have seen it in the streets. She is new to the trade most probably, and has not been took up yet."

"And do you think you can help me to find her?" said Ernestine eagerly.

"We'll find her if she is in Greyburgh, ma'am, I'll be bound. They all find their way here sooner or later; but we'll try if the girls know her; it's pretty sure they do, if she is one of their sort."

"I fear there is little doubt she is," said Ernestine.

"Then you'll not expect to see her look like this?" he said, pointing to the sweet innocent face in the sketch. "She'll have got a bit more brazen before now, you may depend. Here, missus," he shouted, and a fat old woman came waddling into the room at his call. "This here lady wants to go and see the gals; give me your keys, and I'll take her in myself."

"Going to see the gals, are you, ma'am?" said Mrs. Bolton. "Ah! you'd not take a step to see them, if you had as much of them as I have. I am a'most out of my mind with their cantrips."

"A val-ay-ble woman that, ma'am," said the jailer, drawing himself up, and flourishing his hand toward his wife; "five years older than I am, and I'm no chicken, and to see how she cuts about after these vixens, it is a beautiful sight, ma'am, beautiful! The experience I have had in the female sex since I came within these walls is wonderful; you wouldn't credit it. I thought when I came here that women were all made of cheeny and glass; but, bless you! I have had reason to change my opinion. There's some of them it would be worse to meet than a roaring lion, when their blood's up. Why, I had a woman here, six feet in her stocking-soles, committed for trying to ram a red-hot poker down her husband's throat, and he a corporal six feet two. She said she had warned him of her sentiments about his staying out after dark, and she made his tea every blessed night, with the poker heating in the fire for him, till she caught him tripping, and then she was at him like a Philistine. But here are the keys, ma'am. This way."

He rose, keys in hand, and marched in front of her while Ernestine followed, thinking, with no small amuse-

ment, how Hugh Lingard would laugh at the new lights she was gaining in her present adventures. They passed through a heavy door, turning on a pivot, into a dreary stone passage, and having traversed various parts of the building, all gloomier and colder than anything Ernestine had ever imagined, they reached a small paved courtyard surrounded by high walls, where the female prisoners had just been turned out to exercise. The governor told Ernestine, as they went on, that the women who were sent there by the university authorities were always kept apart from those committed for theft or other offenses, and therefore that all now before her were of that doomed class. For a moment Ernestine shrank from raising her eyes to any one of them, but, conquering the painful feeling which oppressed her, she turned toward them with a gentle imploring look, which would have told them, could they have read it aright, how much she hoped they would not suppose she had come there to scorn and humble them, and compare the honor and purity which shielded her own life with the unspeakable degradation of theirs. Some eighteen or twenty women were before her, of all ages, from the hard callous-looking woman of more than thirty, to the mere child of fourteen. All possessed at least some trace of the beauty which had been at once their treasure and their curse, but in not one, even the youngest, was there the least remains of the freshness, the innocence, the frankness of youth and girlhood. It seemed to Ernestine as if they belonged not only to a distinct class, but to a separate race. Gathered as they were from different parts of the country, there was in one and all of them the same restless, unsatisfied ex-

pression, the same quick impulsiveness, with a bright keenness of look like that of some wild animal whose life depends on the winning of difficult prey; nor had she been long in their presence before she saw that sudden bursts of wild gayety, diversified by intervals of sullen misery, characterized them all alike. Some there were, however, in whose eyes the lurking agony was more clearly visible than in others, while the younger girls seemed capable of keeping up, even among themselves, a reckless, mirthful excitement which compelled oblivion of the darker thoughts that would one day overwhelm them altogether. Ernestine felt heart-sick as she gazed at them, for these were all human beings, whom even the world called "lost;" and were they indeed to be lost forever? She was trying with her whole heart to save one of them; but were all these to be allowed to go their way without a hand stretched out to stay their perishing?

The appearance of a lady was evidently an unwonted sight, and the smallest event an excitement in their dreary imprisonment. They crowded together, gazing at Ernestine with eager looks. She soon found she was expected to play her part in a small drama, which the astute governor originated for the occasion.

— "Yes, ma'am, this is our exercise-ground," he said, with a wave of his hand. "Male prisoners walk here at one, female prisoners at two o'clock. We are careful of their health, ma'am; you shall go through their cells presently."

"I am glad they have a little fresh air," said Ernestine.

"O yes, ma'am, and I gives them every indulgence in my power, when they behaves steady and does their

oakum properly. Have you all picked your full quantity this morning?" he added, turning to the women.

"Yes, sir," they answered in chorus.

"Then I'll give you a treat, and let you see this pretty picture," and he held out Annie's portrait. With a shriek of delight they rushed forward, and crowded round him to look at it. For a moment there was a silence, then a shout from two or three, "Why, its Rosie Brown!"

"Well, to be sure, and so it is," said another.

"It's Rosie, only prettier," said a fourth.

"Ah, that's the flowers sets her off," said another; and so on, one and all agreeing on the identity of the portrait. Ernestine remembered Thorold had told her of the probable change of name. Brown was just what Annie might have been expected to choose, and very likely Mr. Brown himself had given the name of Rose to the sweet blushing face represented in the sketch.

"Yes, it is Rosie Brown," said the jailer. "I thought you would know it. It's like her, ain't it? But this was done before she came to Greyburgh."

"Any one may see that," said a girl; "Rosie looks ever so much older now."

"Oh, can you tell me where she is at present?" exclaimed Ernestine eagerly.

"There! you've been and spoiled all," muttered the jailer.

"Yes, sure," said one of the younger girls; "she is at Mother Dor—"

She was interrupted, before she completed the name, by a companion, who twitched her sleeve, while a sharp glance toward Ernestine, and a look of intelligence among themselves passed round the circle.

"Rosie Brown," said the woman who had stopped the other; "oh, she is gone away; been gone ever so long; don't live anywhere near Greyburgh now."

"Polly Smith, if you've got nothing but lies to tell, you'll be pleased to hold your tongue," said the jailer.

"Law bless you, Mr. Bolton," said a slim black-eyed girl, springing half across the yard toward him, "don't you know as Rosie went off in a coach and six, quite grand and respectable? There was a gentleman inside, with a cocked-hat, and I think it must have been the Mayor."

"Lydia Merrit, if you dares to give me any of your chaff, you'll be locked up, that's all. Ma'am, I'll show you over the rest of the jail, if you please now; there's nothing more to see here."

He held the door open for Ernestine, and she could not choose but go toward it, her expressive face shadowed by sorrow at the thought that her own indiscretion had defeated her object. A sad-eyed girl, who had remained silent from the first, was watching Ernestine intently. Suddenly she went toward her, and whispered in a low voice:

"You mean nothing but good to Rosie, don't you?"

"Nothing, nothing but good," said Ernestine anxiously.

"Then you'll find her at Mother Dorrell's in Priory Lane."

"Oh, thank you," said Ernestine, pressing the girl's hand. A look of astonishment passed into the careworn faded face as the woman felt the touch of that soft white hand. She watched Ernestine till the last fold of her dress disappeared through the door, and then

went and sat down in a corner, with her face buried in her hands.

The jailer conducted Ernestine back to his room, and then turned round and looked at her.

"*You* was never made for a detective officer," he said.

"I don't suppose I was," said Ernestine, laughing. "I saw how foolish I had been the moment I asked that question."

"It was a green thing to go and do," said the jailer pensively.

"But did you hear what that girl said to me as we came out?" exclaimed Ernestine. "She said Rosie Brown was at Mother Dorrell's in Priory Lane. It is such an odd address that I remember it well."

"Yes, yes, and it was right enough, no doubt. It was Nell Lewis told you that, and there's a deal of good in that gal. I know all about her from the first, and a bigger rascal than the young fellow that ruined her does not live, for all he is a lord with a fine estate at his back."

"Then if you know where this place is, had I not better go at once?" said Ernestine eagerly.

The jailer sat down deliberately, put his hands on his knees, and looked steadily at her.

"Be you a-going to take my advice," he said, "or be you a-going to take your own way?"

"Oh, I shall certainly take your advice," said Ernestine. "You must know much better than I can do what is best. I only want so much to find this poor girl."

"And you shall find her if you are guided by me, for I'll help you. I'll help you for two reasons: first and

foremost, because I like to help those that are trying to do good. Though I've lived among a blessed lot of blackguards all my days, I still believe it is possible to do them good when folks goes at it with a will as you do. They've got the Lord on their side, and the devil's no match for them; and, secondly, I'll do what I can for you, because you are a real lady every inch of you; and I can tell you, I know a lady when I see her, from a make-believe, dressed up in silks and satins."

"Thank you very much," said Ernestine; "I am sure we shall succeed, if you are kind enough to help me."

"We shall succeed; but first I'll tell you what would happen if you went yourself to Mother Dorrell's. You would knock at the door, and some one would take a look at you through a hole in the shutter of a closed window. You'd be kept waiting a bit; then the door would open, and you would see a most respectable-looking widow, who would say she was sorry to keep you waiting, but she had been lying down, her nerves was so bad ever since her poor dear husband died. Then you would ask for Rosie Brown, and she would say she never heard of no such person; and you would say, Wasn't she one of the gals lodging there? Then she'd hold up her hands, and say, Gals lodging there! whatever did you mean? And you'd say, Wasn't she Mrs. Dorrell? Yes, sure, she was Mrs. Dorrell, a lone widow, getting an honest livelihood; and whoever had dared to say she took in gals to lodge there? O the wickedness of this world! They wouldn't have ventured to say such a thing if her poor dear husband had been alive to purtect her. And she'd ask you to inspeck the premises, and see if she had any room for lodgers there; and you'd see a tidy parlor, with a Bible on the

table and a picture of the Bishop on the wall, and a little kitchen, and nothing more; and you'd pass a little door to the back as you went out again, and take no notice of it. But if you could have opened it, which you couldn't, for the old hypocrite would have the key in her pocket, you'd have seen a court with twenty or thirty rooms round it, and two or three gals in each of them; and there's nothing much more like hell upon earth than that is, so far as sin and wickedness is concerned."

Ernestine shuddered. "I could indeed do no good there; but how then shall I ever see this girl?"

"Well, I shall just speak a word to the university marshal, and tell him all about it; and I'll ask him to get the proctor to go past the place for a night or two with his bull-dogs."

"Bull-dogs!" interrupted Ernestine, astonished.

"That's half a dozen of the university police that follow the proctor on his rounds. I'll get them to walk near Mrs. Dorrell's when the gals are coming out, and I'll let them see this picture. Then they'll keep Rosie in sight till they see some gownsman speak to her, and they'll have her took up in a trice, and soon get her sent off to jail. So you go home, ma'am, and take it easy. Leave it all to me, and in two or three days' time at furthest, I'll send and tell you to come and see her here."

"That will indeed be helping me," said Ernestine; "I am very much obliged to you. I will go and wait quietly as you say; I shall be so thankful to find her at last." Her cheek glowed, and her eyes brightened at the thought; and the jailer, looking at her with evident approval, as she rose to go, held out a huge hand, with

which he solemnly shook hers, looking as if he were celebrating a compact of eternal friendship; and this ceremony over, the turnkey appeared with his keys and conducted her to the gate, whence she hurried home to the unsuspecting Mrs. Tompson, who little thought from what species of society her charge had come.

CHAPTER XV.

REGINALD'S HISTORY.

REGINALD was worse next day. All night the nurse said his cough had racked him, and the morning found him exhausted and yet feverish, and so he continued through the whole day. Dr. Compton stood musingly by the window of the sitting-room, after he had left him in the evening; and at last turning round, he met Ernestine's anxious eyes.

"Of course," he said, "you understand that I can say nothing comforting of your brother's state. I was only thinking just now what a wonderful tenacity of life he displays."

"I dare say you will think me fanciful," said Ernestine, "but it really seems to me as if he could not die so long as this terrible disquiet and unrest is upon him. His horror of death, whatever may be its cause, appears to chain his very soul back to earth, and his whole will is centered in the struggle to cling to life with all his strength."

"No, I do not think you fanciful," said Dr. Compton, in the slow thoughtful manner habitual to him. "The termination of life is of course the result of physical causes; but there is no doubt that the bright, willing acceptance of death I have seen in some cases, does smooth the dark passage to the grave most wonderfully;

persons certainly die more easily, and it may be, at the last, more swiftly, when they have fully resigned their place in this world, and turned their thoughts and hopes to the unseen future. I wish your brother would do so; but—" he said no more, and again stood thoughtfully looking out.

Presently there came a light knock at the door, and the visitor, without waiting for an answer, opened it and walked in. He was a man apparently of middle age, although his hair, which was cut close on his small head, was quite gray. He had a clever face, but with a gentle, quiet expression; and his voice, when he spoke, was peculiarly low and pleasant. He wore the gown of an M.A., and came in, cap in hand, when he perceived Ernestine in the room. Dr. Compton turned round:

"Ah, Vincent, is it you? I am glad you are better. I heard you were laid up in town."

"Yes, I have been ill for six weeks."

"Miss Courtenay," said Dr. Compton, "perhaps you have not met with Mr. Vincent before. Let me introduce him,—one of our college tutors, with whom I believe your brother is a special favorite."

Ernestine remembered the name as that of a man for whom Reginald had a great affection and admiration, and whose lectures he had attended assiduously.

"Yes," he said; "there are few young men for whom I have felt a greater interest than for Courtenay. I am deeply grieved to hear of his illness. I had no idea it was serious when I left Greyburgh. What do you think of him, Compton?"

"I may tell you the truth," said the doctor; "for I have not deceived Miss Courtenay. He cannot re-

cover; there is extensive disease of the lungs, and the progress of the complaint is rapid."

"I am shocked to hear it," said Vincent, who looked sincerely distressed. "I hope I may see him. It will not hurt him, will it?"

"Certainly not; I should think it would do him good to see you," said Compton. "At least, anything that gives him pleasure is good for him."

Vincent smiled, as if there could be no doubt of Reginald's pleasure in seeing him; and as the doctor now took his leave, Ernestine asked him to sit down while she went to tell her brother of his arrival. As she opened the door of the bed-room, she saw Reginald leaning forward with a look of intense anxiety on his face. He beckoned to her hastily to shut the door and come near to him. Then he seized both her hands with convulsive energy, and said in a hoarse whisper:

"Is it Vincent who is there? Is it Vincent?"

"Yes," said Ernestine; "he wants to see you; he seems so kind, and so distressed at your illness."

A moment before, she could not have thought it possible for Reginald's face to become paler than it was; but now, every shade of color receded even from his lips and left him ghastly.

"Ernestine, if ever you have loved me, help me now. Don't let Vincent come near me. To see him would be to recall every moment of agony I have suffered in these last dreadful weeks, and make me live them over again all in one. It is more than I can bear. It would rouse up all the demons of thought with which I have struggled so long. I hoped he would not have returned till my little time of life was past. Don't let me be tortured more than I can bear. Ernie, save me—save me!"

"My dearest," said Ernestine, soothingly, "you shall not see him unless you like. I will go and tell him so. Don't tremble, Reggie; no one shall come near you."

"The thought of the agony it would be to see him is enough to make me tremble; but don't let him think I have lost my affection for him, or that I am ungrateful for his past kindness. Say what you like; only save me from seeing him."

Ernestine went slowly back. She hardly knew how to word the refusal, for she was aware that Reginald had been constantly with Vincent, and had greatly enjoyed his society. Ernestine was, however, of too truthful a nature to have learnt the habit of equivocation in her former fashionable life; so, when she met Mr. Vincent's inquiring look, she lifted her candid eyes to his face, and said:

"I am very sorry that my brother does not feel able to see you. I do not know why. He begs you will not think him ungrateful for your former kindness, or that he has lost his attachment to you; but he is unequal to seeing you."

Vincent bent his keen eyes inquiringly on Ernestine.

"This is very strange," he said, in his low, soft voice, "and, I may say, very painful to me, for Courtenay and I have been great friends. I felt for him as I might have done for a son or a younger brother of my own, and I should have thought that in this his hour of trial it would have been a comfort to him to see me. Is it, perhaps, that he is acting in accordance with advice from others?"

Ernestine looked up astonished. "There is no one to advise him but Dr. Compton and myself, and we should

both have been glad if he could have seen you, and found pleasure in doing so; but the truth is, there is so much in my brother's state of mind which is wholly inexplicable, that he seems to me, mentally, like a man covered with secret wounds, who shrinks from the slightest touch. I am sure you will understand, however, that I must do all I can to avoid his being agitated in his present weak state."

"Surely; and I should be the last to wish to cause him any disturbance, if, indeed, to see me could agitate him. I can hardly think it, and I must hope this is only a passing fancy. Perhaps he is afraid that the sight of me might recall happier times; at all events, I will call to-morrow, and I trust he may then be able to receive me."

"I hope he may," said Ernestine. "I will tell him how kindly you speak of him," and as Vincent took his leave, she opened the door and went softly into Reginald's room. She stopped a moment, in surprise at his position. Through the shadows of the twilight she could see him, leaning forward, gathered almost into a heap, his hands clasped convulsively on the arm of the chair, and his face bent down upon them, while deep gasping sobs shook his whole frame. Ernestine flew to his side. "Reggie, dearest, what is the matter?" She knelt down and tenderly lifted up his head. He turned toward her his ghastly face, tearless, but convulsed with the hysterical sobs, which he could not control, and stretched out his hands to her.

"Oh, Ernie, that I had never seen him! Oh that I could go back to the days before I knew him, when all was bright and clear in the eternal future! What if it

were a dream,—it still was life ; it was hope ; it was rest and peace. Oh, Ernie, it was heaven !” He fell back exhausted. Ernestine sat down quietly beside him, passed her arm under his head, so that he could lean against her, in which position he always rested more easily, and said to him, very gently :

“ My darling, you made me promise not to ask you any questions, and I have not done so ; but I cannot be blind to the fact that the mental agony you have been enduring lately is caused by a loss of hope in the future beyond the grave. I do not know what has produced it, or in what form it has come upon you, but I am sure that nothing else could make the prospect of death so terrible to you. I do wish now, Reginald, that you would unburden your heart to me, and give me back the confidence which never failed between us before. I think it would be a relief to you, and it could not make me sadder than I am to see you so far from peace and hope.” He gave a heavy sigh.

“ Yes, if I have failed to deceive you, I may as well let you know all. It can make little difference now to you, or to myself, and you, Ernestine, who have been my life’s friend, have a right to my confidence. It will be a relief to me to trace back the slow, mysterious steps of the evil that has everwhelmed me at last. But is there no one within hearing ? Shall we be quite undisturbed ?”

“ Quite. Nurse Berry has gone home for the night, and it is too late now for visitors either to you or me.”

“ Draw down the blind then. I do not want to see that starlit sky ; it has been one of the tests of my wretchedness that I can no longer look on it without despair.” He paused a moment, and then resting his

head on Ernestine's shoulder, began in a low, quiet voice to tell her all she so longed to know.

"I first knew that I was dying, Ernie, about a year ago. I had had a cough and pain in the chest for some time previously, but one day I felt a choking sensation, and when I put my handkerchief to my lips it was stained with blood. I thought I knew what that meant, but I determined to ascertain the truth without hinting at my illness to any one here. I went to London, and saw Sir —, the great consumption doctor. I did not tell him who I was, or anything about myself, but I told him I had come to him for an honest opinion. I wanted to know if my lungs were fatally affected, and if so, how long I had to live. He was very frank, indeed, with me. He said the disease had already reached a stage when human aid and skill could no longer check it, and that, indeed, mine was a case which had probably been hopeless from the first. He said that in a warm climate—Madeira, or some such place—I might live two years or so; in England, scarce half that time. My mind was soon made up to be content with the shorter term. A last year of life, in suffering and weakness, would have been dearly purchased by the loss of my friends among the thinking men of Greyburgh, and the opportunities I had here of testing and deepening my knowledge of the only subject that could be of any importance to me from that hour for evermore. I came back with the determination to devote the brief remainder of my life entirely to the study of divinity."

"And you never let me know you were so ill," said Ernestine, sorrowfully.

"I know it seems as if I had been unkind, Ernie, but I did not mean it so. I loved you truly all the time;

don't blame me now. I knew no care, no tenderness, could prolong my life one hour, and I did not want my last precious days to be wasted upon fruitless efforts, moving from place to place, consulting doctors, and all the rest of the useless medical machinery which is such a mockery in a case like mine. The great event that was before me occupied my whole heart and soul—I had so much to do!" He paused a moment, as if a flood of recollections were coming over him, and then went on: "At that time, Ernie, the thought of death was sweet to me beyond what words can at all express. You know that my delicate health had precluded me from entering with much zest into the pleasures of either childhood or youth, and, in fact, I never knew what it was to have any love for this life. From the first moment when I could reason on the uses of existence it failed to satisfy me. I saw in every one of its varied phases its utter incompleteness. Men seemed to me to spend the whole of their allotted time on earth in acquiring, in some shape or other, that which was to perish with them—learning, fame, riches, happiness: which of these things could pass the portal of the tomb? 'There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge in the grave, whither thou goest.' These words seemed to me the bitter commentary written on all the occupations and desires of men; and if there was little in life that I could love, there was much that I could hate and shrink from. Like others who have been destined to an early death, many things were pain and grief to me which caused no pang to sterner and stronger natures. The sight of oppression and cruelty, even when practiced only on poor helpless animals, has made me long to die many a time. Falsehood and injustice, with all the suffering

they cause to others, wore my very soul with fruitless indignation ; low degrading vices, and the coarse sensuality which brutalizes human nature, literally sickened me, and I turned with loathing from the many forms of evil and wretchedness in this world, to long with unspeakable desire for the hour when the Vision of Peace should dawn upon my eyes, the heavenly new Jerusalem in which I believed, even as I believed in Him who was its light, and joy, and glory ; for, Ernestine," and his voice became trembling and broken as he spoke, " this was the master-principle of my whole being at that time, the source of every thought and feeling, every hope and wish, the center round which all my aspirations revolved. I believed in the marvelous revelation of a Love, unearthly, sure, eternal, which is involved in the doctrine of the Incarnation ; and that love—the love of the Incarnate God, seemed to draw me to Himself with an ineffable sweetness and fascination. In it I found the full satisfaction of my whole immortal being. Yes, every faculty, every affection of heart, and soul, and mind, could find expression and rest in a love which combined the perfect sympathy of a heart, human and yet pure, with the perfect protection and wisdom of a God. To know, then, that a few months only separated me from the free and full enjoyment of this the only really Good, was simply rapture to me. The thought of the probable previous suffering, of the pang of soul and body parting, were as nothing in comparison with the inexpressible blessedness of passing into the immediate presence of Him who had loved me even unto the death, and would love me still, forever and forever. Had I died in the day I first heard my malady was fatal, I had gone to the grave with rapturous joy ; and the change

that has passed upon me, the change which makes me now, with unspeakable horror, shrink from the death which I believe to be annihilation, or a worse form of life, because unpurified and hopeless, is the work of the man whom I have just refused to see. You must not mistake me; he did not injure me willfully. It was with no deliberate intention that he brought this curse of unbelief and darkness upon me. Far from it. His desire was to serve me; but it was the inevitable result of his teaching, on a speculative mind like mine, the irresistible deduction from the principles he laid down as the foundation of all religious argument.

“Some time before I knew that my malady was hopeless, I had attended his lectures; and he had enforced upon me strongly what he considered the duty, as well as the privilege, of ‘free inquiry’ as to matters of faith. He said it was unworthy of the reason with which God had endowed us, that we should rest in what he called the hereditary belief we derived from parents or instructors, and quietly accept the teaching of others, without testing its truth for ourselves. Ah! Ernestine, how well I can see the miserable sophistry of such words now! But I did not then. I had not, however, up to that time, followed his leading in this respect. The love of Christ in the atonement was a reality to me; it was in truth all in all!—but when I saw death staring me in the face, when I saw that the time given me to make sure of eternal life was drawing with fearful rapidity to a close, then many words, many casual expressions uttered by Vincent, awoke in me an uncertainty as to whether my faith were right, and not a mere traditionary creed, whose foundations I had in no way tested, while the very fact that this faith was now

so terribly precious to me, as the one hope of the eternity already opening at my feet, made me tremble lest I were in any measure resting in delusions. I felt that I must make sure of the ground on which I was to take my first step beyond the grave; and, in my arrogance, I thought that Vincent was right when he called it a duty to inquire, without fear of sacrilege or presumption, into the deepest mysteries of God, and to demand proofs of them which should be agreeable to human reason. It seemed to me that there could not be a more fitting occupation for my last few months of earthly existence; and I never for a moment doubted that the result would only be to give me firmer confidence, and more entire security, at least in the greater principles of that religion which was my life. And so, indeed, it might have been, but that, for my unutterable loss and misery, I determined to place myself under Vincent's teaching for this inquiry. I believed I could not have a more able guide; and he had always been kind to me, ever ready to help me in any intellectual difficulties. He gladly met my wishes then; and for the remainder of the term I spent the most of my time at his rooms; while for the long vacation I joined a reading-party which went with him to Wales. I resumed the same practices for a few weeks after our return here; but by the time the early winter came I needed his help no more, and the sight of him was very agony to me; for his work was done; the blackness of darkness had fallen over my soul, and my whole being was given up to that awful desolation, which those alone can realize for whom God is yet unrevealed; and existing creeds, the baseless fabrics of a dream."

Reginald paused, his white lips quivering, and the

cold dew standing on his forehead. Ernestine gave him some wine, and kissed many times the thin, waxen hand she held, but she did not speak, and in a few moments he went on :

“What Vincent’s belief was and is, I cannot tell. He is a good man ; nominally he holds the religion of Christ, and in that Name ministers to others, and specially to the poor, by whom he is much beloved. Never in so many words, at least in my hearing, has he denied the great truths on which that religion hangs ; but he cast more than doubt on the means whereby they are revealed to us ; and, by denying certain facts, he left it an open question whether others were true,—by overthrowing the authority of one portion of an indivisible system, he cut away the foundations of the whole. The essence of his own belief seemed to be in a progress of the human race, analogous to that which takes place in the individual man from infancy to age ; and, though he never said so openly, yet I could see, and others saw it as well, that he held what he called the traditionary belief to be but the undeveloped conclusions of the world in its infancy, which could no longer suffice to its growing maturity. Of course, the deduction was obvious, that if, at the point to which he had arrived, so much was to be cut off, it would, in a generation or two, be deemed wise to give up the whole. Ernestine, you know it was a peculiarity of my mind that I could never rest satisfied with the primary and partial results of any theory or principle newly brought before me. I always felt that I could not truly or reasonably either accept or reject a new proposition, till I had sounded the depths of every ultimate possibility involved in it. It was thus that I was compelled to act with every

position Vincent took in our many conversations on religion, and the inevitable result was that I arrived at conclusions which he neither intended nor taught; and which it would probably have shocked him to know I had reached. He seemed himself to have the power to stop short at a given point in the false and dangerous line of thought he pursued; but he could not check the course of another's mind. He could not set a man on a steep, downward path, with impetus violent enough to carry him into the abyss at the bottom, and say, 'Thus far shalt thou go and no farther.' Gradually it became plain to me, though he would never have admitted it himself, that the whole course of his teaching, and the ultimate conclusions to be deduced from them, tended to the practical denial of the one glorious doctrine on which the whole of Christianity hinges. The thought was utter agony to me. I fought with it, as with the deadliest foe. I held back from it with a desperate horror of the result; for his great intellect had overborne my weaker powers. Mentally, I was his slave; and, Ernie, my wretched, helpless struggle was in vain. On, on swept the darkness that was to steep my soul in everlasting night; and the hour came when at last it overwhelmed me, and I could no longer pretend to myself that I believed. I remember that hour! and, if there be an eternity, I shall remember it with anguish in every instant of the illimitable ages.

"I had been reading with Vincent, and in his low quiet voice he had been commenting on certain passages of Scripture, in a manner to give a dark confirmation to the worst conclusions, which his whole course of teaching could possibly lead to. He had

done this in answer to an objection I had raised to some of his arguments,—an objection on which depended the last hold I yet had on the faith in which all my hopes had been centered; and he had overthrown this my final chance with the same calm unconsciousness which from first to last had seemed to characterize his gradual destruction of my belief. I knew that he had done it; and I knew that the worst was come. I could no longer deceive myself. The time had indeed arrived when I must face the truth, and understand what my position really was. I muttered something about feeling ill, and without waiting to hear Vincent's gentle regrets, I rushed from his room, never to enter it again. My brain seemed on fire, while my heart lay like lead in my breast, and I was only conscious of one feeling,—the wish to be alone where none could interrupt me. I dashed away through the streets, crowded with men coming back from their afternoon walk, laughing and talking in careless mirth. I never stopped till I reached the farthest point of the meadow,—your favorite walk, Ernestine, but which in that cold winter evening was completely deserted, and as dreary a spot as could well be found. I flung myself down on the seat under the old oak, whose skeleton branches could not shut out the gray lowering sky. At my feet the dark river went its way, silent and cheerless. All around me the dead leaves lay soaking into the earth, wet with recent rains; the wind moaned and sighed like a spirit in pain, and the bare leafless trees tossed wildly to and fro as it passed shuddering through them. It seemed the uttermost desolation of nature; but oh, Ernestine, what was it to the desolation of the soul which had lost Christ and His love forever!"

He gasped for a moment, and then went on : " As I sat there, feeling at first stupefied and incapable of thought, the last gleam of red light, which the dying day had left like a streak of blood on the horizon, disappeared suddenly in the heavy bank of cloud that rose up to meet the descending shadows, and night fell black and hopeless, as it had already fallen on my living spirit. Then I roused myself, and gathered up such energy of thought as yet remained to me to look my destiny in the face, as it was now and ever must be. Night without morning ; death without resurrection ; eternity without God : this was what I saw as my only future—for the intervening space of mortal existence was I knew passing from me swift as the flight of the night-bird that just then rose with a plaintive cry over my head and vanished into the darkness. Death ! I could imagine the sobbing breath growing faint and ever fainter till it ceased—the familiar faces fading into the dimness shadowing the closing eyes—the heart growing slowly cold and still—the last choking pang of parting life ; and then the motionless clay stretched out before the loving eyes of watchers ; but when I went further, and tried to realize the annihilation which I believed would follow, I could not. Did you ever try, Ernie, to compass in actual mental reality the thought of a total cessation of being for yourself, the complete loss of identity, the extinction of consciousness ? You will find you cannot do it ; at least I could not. Still the ever-living Ego in myself rose rampant, and refused to recognize or believe in any real sense the possibility of its future non-existence. It seemed to me that the deathlessness of that vital consciousness within was an indestructible conviction born with life, an innate idea which no strength of argument

could kill. Reason assured me that annihilation must be my doom, that I had no more right to expect an immortality than the crushed insect at my feet: but the living principle within me rose up in mockery at the thought; it could not, would not perish! When I found this, I turned to look at the alternative, and the very blood seemed to freeze in my veins, as I saw how far more horrible it was than even an extinction of being would have been. Ernestine," and he grasped her wrist with his thin fingers, "think of the soul cast out from the body which housed and sheltered it, and placed it in communication with human affections and capacities, with the sources at least of comfort and rest,—think of it, flung, a helpless breath of indestructible life, an isolated principle of being, of identity, of consciousness, upon the desolate wilderness of illimitable space, like a feather tossed upon the boundless ocean, like a mote wandering on the boundless air,—no God, no Christ, no stay, no rest—no refuge, where it might hope to flee in the most distant immensity—no help, no protection, no love—no possible aim, no imaginable hope—alone, and alone forever, in the most awful of conceivable solitudes, the desert of infinity! This is the doom I had learnt to expect beyond the grave, and, Ernestine, can you wonder that from the indescribable horror to which I am hastening, I shrink with an agony of dread, abhorrence, and repulsion, to which no human words can give expression? Doubtless it is a pitiable sight, to see a dying wretch like me clinging to his diseased decaying life, with an abject terror of its loss. What a coward I must seem, shuddering through my worn frame at the thought of the dissolution which is the universal law of all mankind,—

the death which feeble women and tender children have met with smiles of joy ! But oh, Ernestine, the blackness and coldness of that eternal solitude beyond, who could endure it one instant, even in thought ?—a spark of life alone in the abyss of infinite space !”

“This is too much for you, Reginald,” said Ernestine tenderly, as he remained silent for a moment, under the influence of a strong fit of shivering. “Say no more now, you can tell me the rest to-morrow.”

He did not answer or seem to hear her. His dark eyes, wild and dilated, were fixed on vacancy, then gradually a softer light stole into them, shining through the dew of unshed tears, and he spoke again, not in the hoarse, excited voice with which he had up to this time given out his rapid utterance, but in a low dreamy tone which fell softly on the ear :

“I remember, as I lay upon the ground, crushed under the weight of this awful anticipation, from which I knew I could never escape till the reality swallowed me up, there rose upon my soul a vision of what death would have been if the love of Christ had still been truth to me. I saw myself passing from a life where all was incomplete, where human joys and loves proved to be but the mocking shadows of the divine reality ; where an ever-unsatisfied longing, an ever-enduring restlessness, consumed the living soul, whose eternal rest and satisfaction could be in ONE alone ; and through the grave and gate of death I seemed to float into the serene deep, the pure ecstatic calm of that Love, revealed in living Presence. As a bird flying back to its nest through storms and gloom, I seemed to dart toward that Fount and Center of all peace and consolation, till, clinging with adoring thankfulness to the holy pierced

Feet, I looked up into the Eyes once closed for me in mortal death, and met the infinite tenderness, the unfathomable love of their pitying gaze, and learned in that one look to know that He was the aim and object of my being, the desire of my immortality, the full contentment of every aspiration, the very consummation and perfection of all bliss. Oh, fairest, purest dream! Oh, heavenly light of boundless hope! Oh, blessed vision of rapturous peace! If but one instant it might visit me again, with its sweet soothing promise; if but once more I might imagine I could meet the compassionate eyes of the one True Love, stronger than death and deep as eternity! But in vain, in vain—never, never more—lost, all lost! Ernestine, I am faint; is this death?" and the broken words died on his lips as he sank into a deep swoon. In great alarm Ernestine raised his head, and used strong restoratives, till the feeble pulse slowly beat again, and a tinge of color dyed the white lips. As consciousness returned, he drew her face close to his, and whispered faintly: "One more word I must say that you may know the worst, Ernie." With a great effort he seemed to gather up all his strength to speak, and went on: "The idea of living out my life with that awful prospect beyond it was too intolerable. I determined to lose all thought of the future in that which men call pleasure, but which the God in whom I once believed calls sin. What did it matter if I stained myself with deadly vice, if there were no loving Father, no compassionate Saviour, no sanctifying Spirit, to call for honor and purity from my deathless soul? If there were no God, then was there no law, no righteousness, no distinction between good and evil. To make the most of life, such as it is, by sensual indulgence, is the

religion of men who have no faith, and into this I plunged—loathing it, loathing myself, and ruining the souls of others with my own, till death came near enough to grasp me by the hand and drag me out of it, with but this certainty for fruit of sin, detested in its very commission, that if the religion in which I formerly believed was true, then had I, by my wanton defilement, cut myself off forever from the Holy God.” As he spoke his form seemed to collapse, and his head sank on his breast, till he lay huddled into a heap in his chair. The nurse had been for some time in the next room, and Ernestine called her anxiously to come to him. She shook her head when she saw Reginald.

“Miss Courtenay,” she said, “we must lay him in his bed now. He is too weak to refuse, and he cannot support himself any more in his chair, I am sure.” Ernestine agreed, and together they lifted the light burden and laid him down on the bed from which he was never to rise again. Then the nurse gave him a strong stimulant, which roused him from his stupor, and the mournful dark eyes opened slowly, and fixed themselves on Ernestine with a look which seemed to bring tears from her very heart. She knelt down beside him and whispered :

“My darling, the love you have so longed for is not and never can be lost. It is with you, it is round you still. You cannot see it, as a blind man cannot see the sun, but it is surely there, for the love of Christ is the charity that never faileth.”

He could not speak, but his eyes remained fixed on her with a piteous hungering look, till they gradually closed in utter weariness, and he slept the sleep of exhaustion.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

ERNESTINE had been in a measure prepared for the revelation made to her by her unhappy brother; nor did his complete subservience to the master-mind of another surprise her, for his reasoning powers had never been strong, and his susceptible temperament and ardent imagination laid him peculiarly open to any intellectual influence which might be brought to bear on him. But she remained in sore perplexity and distress about him during the long sleepless hours of that sad night. Was she to let him die in this utter darkness and despair? Yet what could she do? he would certainly refuse to see any one more able than herself to help him, and how was she to reach this wandering soul, from which the very light of life had been stolen? When she returned from the hotel, where she had vainly tried to obtain a few hours' rest, it was plain that a great change for the worse had taken place in Reginald since the night before. He lay now perfectly still, because too weak to move, saying nothing, but showing, by the restless eyes, which spoke volumes to his sister whenever she came near him, that the poor wearied spirit within was still keenly alive to its unabated torture. The doctor came early, and Ernestine saw by his manner that he believed Reginald to have gone down many

steps into the valley of the shadow of death since he had seen him last; but he could do nothing beyond insisting on perfect quiet, and administering the usual composing-draught, which kept him half dozing through the first part of the day.

Ernestine had gone into the sitting room to write a few lines to Lingard, when the door opened softly, and Vincent appeared. The hot blood rushed to her face with the sudden fiery indignation, most unusual to her gentle temperament, which the sight of him produced. She rose up, and remained standing,—unable, with all her habitual courtesy, to ask him to sit down in that room, while, with a quick glance, she satisfied herself that Reginald's door was close shut, so that no sound of the too familiar voice could meet his ear. Vincent came forward, and asked with tender anxiety how Courtenay was.

"He is dying," answered Ernestine with involuntary abruptness.

Vincent looked keenly at her. "You shock me, Miss Courtenay; this is sad news; is he worse than he was yesterday?"

"Much, much worse."

"Then I trust I shall have the comfort of seeing him to-day, as I fear from what you say it might be too late another time."

"It is quite impossible," exclaimed Ernestine.

"Does Compton forbid it?"

"I have not asked him."

"You are acting, then, on your own responsibility in refusing me admission?"

"Yes, and I know that I am right," she answered sadly.

"Miss Courtenay, may I ask you to consider that, notwithstanding the difference of age, I have been your brother's most intimate friend here; and I have some right to demand the opportunity of bidding him a last farewell."

Ernestine turned impetuously toward him: "You can call yourself his friend!" she exclaimed, "when to you he owes it that he is dying the most miserable death it is possible for a mortal man to suffer!" The passionate tears burst from her eyes as she spoke, and, flinging herself down in a chair, she hid her face in her hands. Vincent stood before her quite silent for a moment, and then, in a cold, calm voice, he said:

"This is a very grave charge, Miss Courtenay. I think you will admit that you are bound to substantiate it; to me it is quite inexplicable."

Making a great effort to regain composure, she lifted her head and looked at him.

"My brother came to you in the ordinary course of his studies, full of the deepest peace, and the brightest hope in the faith which he had never doubted one hour. You told him that he was trusting to false securities when he listened to the voice of God speaking to him through the channels of His own divine appointment. You told him that a 'free inquiry' was his duty; that he must seek the truth for himself, with no other guide but his reason; that he must demand to be initiated into the counsels of the Most High, and refuse to believe what he could not understand. His mind is not strong, his reasoning powers are not great; he followed your advice, under your own guidance, and the result has been that all faith, all light, have been obscured for him by the blackness of an utter infidelity, which is

surrounding his death-bed now with the horrors of the most complete despair it is possible to imagine."

Vincent was resting his head on his hand as he leant on the mantle-shelf. He looked down at Ernestine as she spoke, and when her eyes met his, the natural gentleness of her nature reasserted itself within her. "Mr. Vincent," she said, "I feel that I have no right thus to seem to call you to account, though it is hard to watch such a death in silence; but when Reginald told me last night that there were many others on whom your influence had worked as fatally as on himself, I felt the longing wish that you could know the effect of your teaching as I know it now, who have witnessed my brother's agony. It would be some consolation even for his bitter misery and ruin," she continued, her voice choked with emotion, "if his cruel sufferings might save others from the risk of such a doom. I think it would, if you could see—"

She stopped, unable to proceed; and after a moment of painful silence Vincent said: "Did your brother tell you that *I* had taught him infidelity?"

"Not in so many words, but you threw discredit on the sources whence his faith was derived. You cut away the old foundations from beneath his feet, and opened the way to dangerous speculations; you led him to a given point in theories whose ultimate conclusions could be none other than a denial of the truths he held; and however little you may have intended such a result as has arisen, you first enforced this free inquiry upon him, which has been his ruin."

"But," said Vincent, "unless men are to accept with a blind senseless submission the creed which comes to them by inheritance, without ever investigating its

truth for themselves, what other guide can they have but the reason their Creator has given them?"

"They have the Word of God, the witness of the church, and the voice of Him who redeemed them, speaking to their souls, if they will but hear Him."

"These are the very points on which we require proof; and how are they to be tested but by reason?"

"The Redeemer of the world gave a very different test," said Ernestine, lifting her clear eyes to his face. "He said we were to learn the truth by personal holiness; 'Whosoever will do the will of my Father which is in heaven, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.' He has once for all proclaimed Himself to be the Light of the world, and called on men to prove His truth by following Him, for in so doing they should not walk in darkness, but have the Light of life; and this is but the echo of more ancient teaching, when, long before Christ came, His Father had announced to men of old: 'If with all your hearts ye truly seek Me, ye shall ever surely find me.' But, Mr. Vincent," said Ernestine, checking the words which seemed to burst almost involuntarily from her lips, "I feel that it is not for me to talk on such subjects with you; it is not a woman's province; and I have no wish to step beyond that, even if I were competent to argue with you. But one thing only I think I have a right to say, after witnessing the anguish of such a death-bed as my brother's. Whatever your own opinions may be, you have of course undoubted liberty to hold them free from questioning by any human being, but why—why will you tamper with the faith of others? This is what I cannot understand in you, and teachers like you. Why risk a calamity so terrible as the loss of faith to any

living soul, knowing, as you do, how subtle, how delicate is the hold we have on truth in this imperfect life, and how dreadful is the agony of doubt, the utter void and darkness of unbelief? Is it not enough that men have sin and temptation and a thousand perils to beset them on the path of eternal life? Why loosen their grasp on the only support on which they can lean with hope of safety? Why seek to make others share opinions of whose truth you can never be certain on this side of the grave, when in so doing you must disturb the calm which they believe has come to them from God? What if you imagine this to be delusion, death alone can prove if you are right or wrong,—too late for reparation to undying souls. Mr. Vincent, have you never thought what it is you are doing if the ancient faith you are undermining in these souls be indeed the very truth of God? Is it not their very life, their eternal life, which you are taking from them? Oh, surely it were better and safer to hide forever in your own mind the doubts and speculations which may work such fearful ruin. Your own life is given you as a prey, but the souls of others are in the hands of God. Oh, why not leave them safe with Him?" She was almost sobbing before she ceased, and Vincent looked at her with an expression of deep pain.

"Miss Courtenay, believe me, I would rather die than consciously injure the souls of others. But is there not a duty to the truth itself? Are we not bound by this free inquiry, against which you protest so warmly, to secure that truth from being falsified or misrepresented or overlaid with human traditions?"

"Cannot God defend His own truth, the true faith once given to the world? And is it likely that all the

endless varieties of human intellect and reason, swayed by the impulses and motives of individual temperament, could meet in acknowledgment of the only truth? Mr. Vincent, I pretend to no logical power of argument, or to learning a hundredth part as great as yours, but this I know, your teaching has wrecked the soul of him who lies there dying in despair; and I cannot believe that the utmost good you could ever have hoped from the avowal of your opinions, could weigh for a moment in comparison with the inestimable value of one deathless soul."

He listened, his eyes fixed on her face, and, without waiting for an answer, she held out her hand and said, "I must go to Reginald now; forgive me if I have spoken too freely."

He held her hand tightly for a moment, and then spoke in a low voice, "If indeed I have caused your brother the pain you speak of, it is I who need forgiveness; and in any case I deeply grieve for his distress and yours; but I find it hard to believe my teaching has caused a result so different to my wishes." He seemed as if he would have said more, but, checking himself, he loosened his hold and turned slowly away.

Ernestine went at once to her brother. He was lying quite still upon his bed, but there was an unusual brightness on his face, and all physical pain seemed to have ceased. The nurse had seen too many death-beds not to know what these indications meant; but seeing no alarm in Ernestine's expression, she did not like to speak too freely.

"He is a little revived, ma'am," she said, "and has been asking for you very often. He can speak without

coughing now, but I don't quite like his look," she added in a whisper, as she passed out of the room.

To Ernestine it seemed, however, as if, for the time at least, he were better. His voice was stronger, and his mind evidently quite clear. As she came and sat down beside his bed, he drew her close to him, and asked, with a look of intense eagerness, "Ernestine, on what ground did you make that assertion last night? What is the evidence on which you found your strong faith in Christ and His love?"

"The evidence of my own soul," she answered. "I *know Him* in the inmost depths of my spirit, not as a mere object of faith, but as a living Person, whose presence I can recognize to be a vivid reality as clearly as if I saw Him with my bodily eyes. It is a faith not only in the historical Christ of eighteen centuries back, but in the Being, truly existent now, so surely as I live myself, who this day hears me when I speak to Him, who this day is conscious of every thought and feeling of my heart."

"Internal evidence!" said Reginald; "that is not a ground on which logicians or scientific men would consider that any principle of faith could be established."

"That may be; but there are some truths known as realities to the soul, which neither science nor logic may be able to discover. Reginald, I find it difficult to explain my convictions in words, but I will try. My trust, my whole confidence, is given irresistibly to the actual personal Christ, who is known and admitted by all to have existed once upon this earth. It is not the outward manifestations of His divinity which chiefly satisfy me, but the perfection, the unearthly loveliness of His character and life, which are unquestionable facts.

My belief is in the Being, whom historical truth makes known to us in the incomprehensible greatness of His love, His justice, His purity, His utter abnegation of self. Nothing in the whole wide universe would induce me to believe that He, such as He was, could have come into this world to deceive, or even to have let that human race, whom He loved unto the death, deceive themselves concerning Him; nor could I for one moment look back upon the Mount of Calvary, and see Him in His calm, willing suffering, His majesty of forgiveness, His tenderness, His pity, the Omnipotent dispossessing Himself of life, and believe that He was mistaken. My faith is in His own individual truth, and, therefore, apart from all external evidences, I know that He of a surety is that which He represented Himself to be. For all mysteries, for all difficulties, for all apparent incompleteness even in His manifestation of Himself, I rest upon His own solemn assurance, 'What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter;' and oh, Reginald, there are other words of His, which, because of His incontrovertible holiness and love, might well have power to lay the whole unquiet world to rest,—*'If it were not so, I would have told you.'* If He were not the incarnate God, He would have told us; He would never have let us rest in false hopes of Himself. If He could not have saved us, He would have told us; if His sacrifice upon the cross were not indeed the atonement for the sins of the whole human race, He would have told us. Oh, Reginald, He, such as He was, such as all admit Him to have been, would never have bidden the hungering, thirsting generations of the dying world to come to Him, if He could not indeed have given them life."

She remained silent, feeling the convulsive grasp of Reginald's hand tightening on her, and his breathing growing more rapid with emotion as she spoke; but she was unable to divine what thoughts were passing through his mind, and he did not speak. Suddenly a slight noise at the open door attracted her attention, and, looking up, she saw Thorold standing on the threshold. Reginald perceived him too, and instantly, with a great effort, he raised himself on his pillow and held out both hands toward him in silence, but with an appealing look which could not be mistaken. Thorold was at his side in a moment, and Ernestine went softly out of the room and closed the door, leaving them together. She felt thoroughly exhausted, and, sitting down, she let her head fall on the table before her, and remained a long time in that position, hardly knowing where she was, as her thoughts wandered far into the world beyond the grave.

At last, when a period much beyond what she imagined had elapsed, and unconscious that her name had been called several times without her hearing it, she felt a gentle touch on her shoulder. She started, and turned round to meet Thorold's grave, calm look.

"You must come at once to your brother," he said, "but be prepared."

"For what?" she said, with a sudden gasp.

"For the end, which is come. He is sinking fast."

She flew into Reginald's room, and flung herself on her knees beside him, but no word or glance told that he knew her. He had reached that awful, mysterious moment, when the boundaries of mortal sense are past, though life is not yet extinct. The spirit hovered already on the confines of the Unseen, and the eyes, wide open,

were fixed upward in that look of fascinated awe and amazement, which those who have once seen it in the eyes of the dying can never forget. The sight checked the cry of love and anguish on Ernestine's lips, as appalled, she saw that, from the midst of his doubt, and darkness, and error, Reginald was passing to the inexorable truths of the changeless eternity. She would fain have called him back, if by any means he might yet have been armed and strengthened for the dread realities opening before him, but she dared not speak.

Thorold's voice, uttering the solemn words of the commendation of souls, alone thrilled through the death-chamber, as the dark, unmistakable shade stole over the wan face, and the breath, gasped out at longer and ever longer intervals, ceased at last to stir the white lips with even the faintest motion. Silently, secretly, the mighty mystery was accomplished. The living, sentient soul was gone to know God in His justice and in His love, where no human speculations or error could dim the glory of His everlasting truth; and the wasted form, in which it had sinned and suffered, lay cold and motionless beneath the burning tears of that poor human love, which is ever so helpless in the face of death.

Yes, he was gone! And whether in that last hour the ineffable pity of the Lord he had denied restored him faith and gave forgiveness, or whether he passed away in his awful darkness, could never be known till the day when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed, and the dread uncertainty must remain as a shadow on Ernestine's life for evermore. What passed between Thorold and Reginald in that supreme hour she never knew. No word on the subject ever escaped Thorold's

lips, and she respected his silence too much to seek from him even the expression of an opinion which might have quieted her painful anxiety. Only once, a few days later, as she and Thorold stood one on each side of the coffin, looking down for the last time on the white still face before it was hid away forever, her intense anxiety with regard to Reginald found expression in the earnest pleading look of her eyes as she raised them on Thorold. He understood and answered, "It is not for man to judge. Only remember this, that while the justice of God is immaculate, His mercy is beyond what the human heart can ever in this world conceive. 'God is love.'"

CHAPTER XVII.

ANNIE BROOK.

It was well for Ernestine Courtenay, at this period, that her unselfish interest in Annie Brook made it impossible for her to dwell too exclusively on her brother's death, and the painful circumstances attending it. When Thorold had appeared so opportunely in Reginald's room, he had come to tell her that Rosie Brown had been arrested the night before, and committed to jail for a fortnight. He told Ernestine he thought it would be as well that she should not see her for the first few days, that the girl might have time to realize the additional disgrace and wretchedness which her position had acquired by this first imprisonment; and it was not until a day or two after Reginald's funeral that Ernestine, exhausted by her grief, felt able for her visit to the object of her long search. She looked forward to this interview with intense anxiety. What if, having found the lost child, she should fail to win her from the deadly evil that enthralled her? She felt that she never could endure to let her go again. Yet legally she had no power to detain her, if Annie should refuse to leave her accursed life and her bad companions, and Thorold warned her that she must not be too sanguine.

The old jailer received her with immense cordiality. He came himself to the second gate to meet her, and, without saying a word, held out his capacious hand,

and took hers with an air which implied that their sworn friendship was a fact which he defied the world to disprove. He conducted her to his own room, and begging her with a majestic wave of the arm to be seated, he took his usual place opposite to her.

"Well, ma'am, we've been and caged your bird for you," he said.

"Yes," said Ernestine, "I am so very glad, and I should have been here before to see her, only—" She glanced at her black dress.

"I know," he said; "there's not much goes on in this here town without my knowing of it. I'd like to see the man as would go and get buried in Greyburgh without telling me first,—leastways his friends. Well, ma'am, Rosie Brown's here, and she's a bright bit of a thing, that it is a sin and a shame to see driven, to such a trade as this. Now, I'll tell you what I've done to help you. The gals that were here when you were so uncommon green in letting them see you wanted her had only three days of their term to make out when she came, so for that time I kept her down in the kitchen with my missus, and would not let her see one of them, except when some of us was there to prevent them speaking to her. They are so awful set against Penitentiaries, since one or two of them have tried them, they'd have persuaded her on no account to hear a word you said for fear you sent her to one. However, you'll find I have kept the road clear for you; neither she nor the gals we've got in now have ever heard of you."

"I am so glad to hear that," said Ernestine; "it would have been hard indeed to have lost her before I had even spoken to her. Has the chaplain seen her?"

"Well, he has seen her in the chapel at prayers, and he has said a word or two to her along with the rest; but bless you! he has not time to lay a finger on the souls of one of these poor wretches. He is a good man, and he'd like to do his best for them, but' he can't be in four places at once, and he had need to be if he was to be of any real use as a parson; for I don't count just putting on his white gown and saying the prayers, or giving them a Bible-class altogether, as the parson's real work. I want to see him drag their souls back from hell, and fight it out with the devil for each one of them; and how is he to do that when he is chaplain of the workhouse at Burton as well as here at the prison, and when he has a church and a parish besides, and when he's got to take the chaplain's work at the other jail when he happens to be ill, which that chaplain do happen to be pretty often? and if that's not enough, this poor parson of ours has got private pupils at home, besides a wife and children to see to."

"How strange!" said Ernestine; "I thought there would have been a chaplain entirely devoted to the jail. There must be quite work enough for one clergyman among so many prisoners."

"Work enough and to spare; but you see, ma'am, our great people here who manage these things, they looks to the money, and, judging by the salary they gives the chaplain, they must count the souls of these prisoners to be dear at half-a-crown a piece; for he don't get so much, by a good deal, as you'd give your butler, ma'am. Well, he's got a wife and children, worse luck for him, and he must feed them; and as he don't get much more at the workhouse than he does at the jail, he has to try it on with a few more things to get enough for their

food and clothing. These matters want looking into by some one who would have the power to set them right. But it will soon be locking-up time, so if you please, ma'am, I'll tell my missus to bring Rosie Brown to you." He rose and went out.

Ernestine almost trembled when she found herself waiting at last for the child whose fate had lain so heavy on her heart. The white still face of Lois seemed to rise up before her with its mute, mournful entreaty, and her heart thrilled with the earnest longing, that by any means she might have power to win the yet living soul of that dead girl's sister to repentance.

"There, gal, you go in there; there's a lady wants to see you, and mind now how you behave, or you'll have a double lot of oakum-picking." And Mrs. Bolton, who had not had time to perform a sufficiently elaborate toilet, opened the door, pushed in her charge, and closed it again without appearing.

Ernestine Courtenay was alone with Annie Brook. A young girl, in whom she at once recognized the original of the portrait, stood before her, and dropped a little curtsy as she met her gaze. She wore the prison dress, which, uncouth as it was, gave her an appearance of modesty and propriety she most probably would not have possessed in her own gay clothing. Her face had still much of the childish loveliness which her likeness had so well represented. The wealth of sunny hair was there, escaping from under the coarse white cap, and the large blue eyes yet shone beneath it,—bright, though restless; but the sweet look of candor and innocence was gone, and the face was very pale and haggard, while an expression half defiant and half sullen had replaced the smiling gladness which was so char-

acteristic in the sketch. Yes! she was the same;—yet how changed, deeper than the change from mortal life to death! for over her undying soul had passed the darkness of that great mystery which changed the Eden of God's creation to a world of chaotic sin and sorrow, whose mournful beauty ill contrasts with the moral evil that taints it everywhere. In this fair child's lingering loveliness there were yet dim traces of the Image in which she was first created; but on her spiritual being had fallen the dreadful desolation of unrepented sin.

Never before had Ernestine Courtenay thus stood face to face with one on whom the brand of social disgrace was indelibly marked, who, in addition to the secret stings of conscience, had the consciousness of that public degradation which entailed upon her the scorn or avoidance of all whose good name was yet untarnished; and she would have been expected, not only in her own caste, but even by those whose charity made them seek to reclaim such sinners, to consider herself bound, for the sake of principle and the girl's own moral good, to hold her at an immeasurable distance, and teach her, by word and look and manner, the gulf which lies between the fallen and the pure. But, happily for Annie Brook, Ernestine followed the instincts of that inner sense with which the love of Christ had gifted her, and there was, though she knew it not, the deepest wisdom, as well as the truest charity, in her mode of action; for if ever human agency is to work for good upon the erring, it must be by the faint but true reflection of the one Love which alone gives hope of life and restoration to a ruined world; and, so far as regards the special class to which Annie Brook belonged,

it is a short-sighted policy indeed which would suppose they require coldness and haughtiness on the part of the unfallen to teach the awful distance which lies between them. They know it already, these poor lost women. God help them! they know it with a bitterness of knowledge which brings keener anguish to their souls than the direct insult their fellow-creatures could inflict. Seldom, doubtless, does one of them, however hardened, look in the face of those who have not known their temptation or their sin, without a maddening sense of their own unspeakable loss, and an anguish of envy almost akin to that which the spirits of the lost might feel when gazing across the gulf to Paradise. It is not the religious aspect of their state which moves them. Most often they do not know of religion, even the name; but it is the innate instinct implanted in them by God, which makes them feel to their heart's core that purity is the one priceless treasure which marks the boundary between the soul's own inmost heaven and hell.

Ernestine Courtenay stretched out both hands to the fallen girl before her, and, clasping hers with a warm pressure, exclaimed, "Dear Annie, I am so thankful to have found you!"

The girl looked up at her with a glance of surprise. "Do you know me?" she said.

"Yes, Annie, though I have never seen you before, I know you well, and I am your true friend. Sit down here beside me, and I will tell you why I have come to you."

With evident reluctance, and shunning Ernestine's eyes, Annie did as she was told; but the sound of her real name, so long unheard, seemed to fill her with

vague apprehensions that her conduct was about to undergo a scrutiny it could ill bear, and that the liberty of action she had so long misused would now be assailed. There was a good deal of sullen rebellion in her expression as she sat beside Ernestine, rolling her apron-strings in her fingers, and looking determinately down at them. Ernestine was fully resolved to tell her Lois's whole history, as the surest mode of leading her to hate and dread her own wretched life, but she feared to shock her by too abrupt an announcement of her sister's death.

"Annie, I have come to you from one who loved you well," she said.

A flood of crimson color dyed the girl's fair face at these words. Her lips parted, and she turned to Ernestine with a half-uttered question. It was plain that her thoughts had flown to the man whose love had been her curse; but a dark remembrance seemed to come upon her; the glow died out, and was replaced by a look of dogged despair.

"There was few that ever loved me, and there are none now," she said.

"You are mistaken there, my child; but the one who caused me to come here to look for you was your own sister Lois."

"Lois!" she said, with a sad bitterness; "she has been my worst enemy; she and her fine make-believe husband. I would never have left father but for her, and then—I should never have been here." She covered her face with her hands, a flood of bitter memories coming over her.

"I know," said Ernestine, "it was very cruel to take you from your home; but poor Lois bitterly repented it,

and you must not think unkindly of her now; indeed you must not."

Something in her tone struck the girl. She turned round :

"Is anything wrong with Lois? I left her gay enough, I am sure."

"It was a wretched gayety, and had a wretched ending. Annie, you will never see Lois again in this world."

"Is she dead?" almost screamed the girl.

"She is indeed; poor Lois is already lying in her lonely grave."

In an instant tears were bursting from the bright blue eyes, and a convulsion of grief, as brief as it was violent, passed over the impulsive girl. As she rocked to and fro in her wild sobbing, Ernestine gently held her hand, and smoothed the fair hair, till the soft tender touch unconsciously soothed her. After a few minutes her passionate agitation subsided; she wiped her eyes, and, speaking in a gentle, humble tone, said :

"Please to tell me all about her, ma'am."

"I will, my dear child," said Ernestine; "but it will be very sad for you to hear it." Then, conquering her repugnance to speak of her brother, she began: "You know the—the gentleman with whom Lois was living, was not her husband?"

"I know it—I know it; no more was he my husband who drew me from home with his fine promises, and then flung me on the streets to get my living."

Ernestine sighed heavily as she thought of the countless similar victims whom selfish wickedness had driven to hopeless misery. She went on sadly :

"Lois was deserted at last by this gentleman. After a time she heard he was going to India."

"Oh, that must have gone night to break her heart, she did love him so. Was that what killed her, ma'am?"

"No," said Ernestine; "it would have been happier for her if she had died of a broken heart. She unwisely thought she could go to India with him, and came on board the ship where he was, and then she found he was married, and she had to go on shore and leave him."

"That would put Lois almost wild. What did she do, ma'am?"

"The worst, the saddest thing she could do, Annie: she took away her own life; she drowned herself."

"Drowned herself! O poor Lois! O my poor darling sister! It's too sad—it's too hard. Oh, to think of her lying in the cold, cold water, all wet and cold and dead! And we used to sleep together, she and I; and she would cover me up so warm, and kiss me always first and last thing, night and morning. Oh it's cruel—it's cruel! Why did that bad man take her from her home to ruin her—and me? Oh it's all so miserable! I wish I were dead, like her, and lying with her in the grave!" And the sobs, which had been bursting from her through all her incoherent words, now fairly choked her; in a paroxysm of agony she flung herself on the floor; but Ernestine lifted her up, so that the poor sunny head, now brought so low, might rest upon her knees, and then she let her weep out there the grief that would have vent. Gradually she became more calm, and, quite exhausted, she lay like a tired child in Ernestine's compassionate arms.

"Annie," she said gently, after a time, "I think you will like to know that Lois's last thought was for you,

and the very last words she ever wrote were all for you alone. It is because of what she wrote then, that I am here."

"What did she say, ma'am? I should like to know," and she lifted up her head and listened anxiously.

"She said that in the last most awful hour, when she was going to try and escape, by a guilty death, the sin and misery that seemed more than she could bear, her only wish, her only prayer was for you, that you might be rescued out of the life you were living, and saved from such a death as she was dying. She knew it was through her fault you had fallen away, and this was the bitterest thought in all the bitter grief that weighed her down. Annie, when Lois wrote that about you, she was very near the other world, where she would see face to face the God she had offended, and the Saviour she had forgotten; and she saw things then as they really are, and not as they appear to us when death seems far away and this world everything. She saw how very short life is, and how quickly all its pains and pleasures pass, whether they be for good or evil. She saw and knew what a terrible madness, as well as sin, it is in us so to spend our little time on earth doing the devil's will, not God's, that when we come to die we have nothing but eternal punishment before us, instead of trying to lead good and holy lives, that we may be happy with the dear Lord Christ forever. Annie, poor Lois had no hope for herself. She was going to die a sinful death, as she had lived a sinful life, but she thought there might still be hope for you; so she spent her last moments upon earth in writing to the man who first led you both to evil, entreating him to find some means to save you out of your wretched life, and give you a chance

of coming back to the blessed Lord who died for you, and still loves you, Annie, deeply as you have sinned against Him. The letter your poor sister wrote was given to me, and I only waited to see her laid in the grave before I came to look for you, my child, and save you from your misery, if you will let me."

The girl's face was bowed upon Ernestine's hands, which were wet with the tears she seemed to shed in silent hopelessness; and now she neither moved nor spoke, but only breathed long shuddering sighs, which shook her whole frame.

"Dear Annie," said Ernestine, after a few moments' silence, "will you not listen to Lois pleading with you from her very grave? and still more," she added, in a low tone, "will you not hear the voice of your departed Lord speaking to you from the blessed heaven, where He longs to have you with Himself?" And then, in words too solemn for these pages, she spoke to the lost child of the Love that suffered for her sin, and even now watched and waited for her in realms of deathless light. She spoke of the eternal desolation of the soul cut off from Him, and of the ineffable sweetness of pardon that might yet be hers, if she sought the grace of true repentance, and washed the sin-stained garments of her soul in the precious Blood, which alone could make them white as snow. Long and earnestly, with glistening eyes and trembling voice, Ernestine spoke of the home beyond the grave, and the rest it gave from sin and temptation, from pain and weariness, and cruelty of man—of the blessedness of laying down the tired head upon the Feet once pierced for us, in safety and in peace for evermore; and, with her whole heart in each word she uttered, she implored the fallen girl to

break away from the hideous, loathsome evil that encompassed her, and fly for refuge to the Deathless Pity that never failed the repentant soul, how dark soever all past sin might be. "Annie, Annie, say that you will turn and repent," she added. "I cannot leave you till you have promised me to save your soul from living death."

Then the girl flung out her hands passionately, and exclaimed :

"What shall I do? Oh what shall I do? I know it's a wicked and wretched life; and I thought at first I'd rather die than join in it; but he drove me to it—he, the only one I ever loved. Yes! he forced me to it, and told me it was all I was fit for now; he who ruined me; and oh, when I heard that—when I knew that he thought me lost and degraded already—I did not care what came of me, and I tried to believe it was a gay life, as others said, and to forget everything, or I should have gone mad altogether; but oh! I have been wretched, and I am wretched now, and yet I can't leave it—I can't. He who took me away has deserted me forever, and father will never look on me again; and Lois is dead, and I can never, never go back to what I was. Oh, why was I born? why was I born?" and she rocked herself from side to side in uncontrollable emotion.

That agony was upon her—the fiercest that human nature can ever know—the agony of regret for dark deeds done in the irrevocable past, which never, in all the everlasting ages, can be undone again! God help those who have known, and yet may know, the burning fire of that intolerable anguish!

Ernestine's intense power of sympathy made her thoroughly comprehend the living torture embodied in

that writhing frame, and she let the girl's misery have its way for a time; then she gently took her hand, and said :

"Annie, my child, if you will only trust me, I will find you a home where you will be safe and peaceful, if not happy as you once were; and where, in a good and useful life, you may win your way back to our blessed Lord, who is our only consolation and our only real joy. Say that you will trust me, dear child, and I will come for you the day you leave the jail, and take you with me. You will come to me, will you not?"

Annie lifted her head and looked at Ernestine; and as she met the sweet eyes which were so full of pitying, pleading love, her heart seemed to melt within her. She let her head fall down again on the delicate hands which held her own, and said :

"You are so kind and good, I must do what you wish. I will go with you wherever you like."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE REFUGE.

THUS far the victory was gained, and Ernestine was very thankful; but her interview with Annie Brook had roused her gentle nature to a degree of indignation against the man who had destroyed her, of which she could hardly have believed herself capable. When she wrote that evening to tell Lingard that she had really found the unhappy girl she had sought so long, she gave vent involuntarily to some of the strong feelings which moved her.

"Apart from the actual wickedness of his conduct," she wrote, "which lies, of course, between himself and his God alone, I could not have believed it possible that any man could have been, not only so cruel, but so cowardly and so mean, as to rid himself of his victim when she became a burden to him, by forcing her into the last depths of sin and degradation, because his own treachery had made her, as he thought, fit for nothing else! And this pitiful, selfish being is, no doubt, received by his acquaintance as if he were good and honorable, instead of really deserving to be branded with a thousand times more of infamy and disgrace than the poor child for whom he has prepared a life of misery here and eternal death hereafter. I hope this man will never cross my path in the course of my lifelong care of his victim, for I feel as if I could not breathe the same air with him;

nor would I consent to the smallest intercourse with such a one; for I can no longer abide by the world's code of morals on this subject. It seems to me simply a mockery of the God of truth and purity and justice, whom we profess to worship, to visit the poor, weak victim with the heaviest punishment, casting her out like the leper of old, while we allow the greater criminal to come among us, not only unscathed, but welcomed and honored."

Ernestine received no direct answer to this letter; but a day or two later, Lingard wrote, urging her most warmly, now that her object was accomplished, to come to London and let arrangements at once be made for their marriage. He was now certain of the appointment he had been expecting, and there was no further reason for delay, excepting her brother's recent death; and he trusted she would not think it necessary to wait till the period of her mourning had quite expired. Ernestine answered by promising to come to town the following week, so soon as she had placed her charge in some safe refuge; and as it was now early in May, she agreed that their marriage should take place in the course of the summer.

In the mean time her great anxiety was to provide a safe home for poor Annie, before the time when her term of imprisonment expired, which would be in the course of a few days. She knew that there were now, happily, various "Homes" and Penitentiaries where such a one could be received; but she had no idea where it would be best to apply. She therefore wrote a line to Thorold, telling him she had been thus far successful in persuading Annie to begin the work of repentance, and begging him to tell her where it would be wisest to

place the poor child. He came to her that same evening, on his way to the night-school, just as Mrs. Tompson, attired in elaborate slight mourning, was starting for a dinner-party at the Granbys'. Ernestine inwardly rejoiced at the fortunate circumstance which prevented her chaperon from assisting at a conversation which was likely to make her hair stand on end; for poor Ernestine's interest in Annie Brook had not in the slightest degree shaken Mrs. Tompson's allegiance to the orthodox theory, that such individuals, and the Homes that shelter them, should be simply ignored, and considered non-existent by all persons of "good society." Whether the privileges of good society were to extend into the other world, when the proscribed class, and those who might have saved them, met face to face, was not a question into which this well-bred lady thought it necessary to enter. Mrs. Tompson was, however, by no means satisfied to forego her proper duties as Ernestine's chaperon.

"A most extraordinary hour for a morning call!" she exclaimed, as she heard Thorold coming up the stair. "Introduce me, my dear," she added in a whisper, as he appeared.

This ceremony Ernestine performed with a smile lurking on her lips, which Thorold quickly detected.

"I have much pleasure in making your acquaintance, Mr. Thorold," said Mrs. Tompson, with a sweeping salutation, to which he responded with the utmost gravity; "but unhappily it is rather late; I am on the point of going to dine with Dr. and Mrs. Granby. Miss Courtenay does not go out in consequence of her recent bereavement, and is, I think, fatigued; but if you could give us the pleasure of seeing you to-morrow, instead

of this evening, we should then both be able to receive you."

"I am afraid I cannot at all answer for what I may be doing to-morrow," he answered quietly; "but I think Miss Courtenay can spare me a few minutes now. Will you allow me to conduct you to your carriage, which I see is waiting?" and he offered his arm with such exquisite politeness, that Mrs. Tompson was fain to accept it, and allow her silks to rustle down stairs in company with his rough great-coat, as if they were most congenial companions. He placed her in the carriage, told the coachman to drive on, and having satisfactorily dispatched her, came up the stairs two or three steps at a time.

"You have asked me a difficult question," he said, plunging into his subject at once, as he sat down. "I doubt if I can recommend any Penitentiary to you which would be likely to suit a girl of so impulsive a temperament as Annie Brook."

"Do you not approve of the system on which they are conducted?" asked Ernestine.

"I approve of their theory but not of their practice. The state of the case is just this: Some years ago, a strong impetus was given to the exercise of charity on behalf of that unhappy class. It was shown to be a black stigma on our country that they should be left to perish by thousands, with scarce an effort made for their rescue; and it was further demonstrated with great truth, that the only persons who could undertake their reformation, with any chance of success, would be earnest, religious women of the upper ranks, who would be willing, for the love of Christ, to devote themselves to so painful a task. Thus far, nothing could be better.

The principles on which they started were sound in themselves, and their fruits were the same up to a certain point. Many Homes for the Fallen were established all over the country, and good women were found to conduct them, whose saintly self-denial and true devotion of heart and soul are beyond praise. So far as they themselves and their honesty of purpose are concerned, not a disparaging word can be said; they are living for others in the true abnegation of self, which is the sure test of Christ's people; and I doubt not that they will be of those who, in the day of His glory, will be astonished at the greatness of their salvation, so far beyond what they looked for; but all this does not prevent the fact that they have, as I believe, started on a mistaken system, so far as the treatment of these poor sinners is concerned, which has greatly marred their success. They begin with the fatal error of dealing with those unhappy girls as if they were what they are called—*penitents*; whereas not one in a hundred has even such knowledge of God, and of a future state, as would enable them to understand what penitence means. And, building on this erroneous foundation, they fix for them a rule of life, which none but persons not only heart broken with remorseful sorrow for sin, but possessing also cultivated minds and highly-wrought religious feelings, could endure for any length of time. I cannot enter into details; but, generally speaking, the system in our Penitentiaries is one of great overlegislation; of unchanging conventual strictness; of iron rule binding on the corporate body without relaxation for individual temperament or circumstances; of monotonous duties, irksome punishments, religious services too often, which they do not understand, and an almost

total deprivation of open air and exercise. Add to this, that the exemplary ladies who guard them have conceived the unfortunate idea that, instead of working on their affections, they are to teach them the difference between the holy and the fallen by treating them with distance and coldness, and by rigorously demanding, and enforcing by penalties, the highest respect to themselves as their superiors,—and you will have some of the causes which have rendered these Homes more repugnant to their inmates than the jail, as they themselves say, and which makes them, with few exceptions, so unwilling to remain, or to return to them a second time. And this brings me to my difficulty; I cannot tell you of any one of those Refuges where I think you can place Annie Brook, with any hope that she will be able to endure the rigid discipline long enough to work a real reform.”

“I am sure Annie is not a girl who could stand severity,” said Ernestine, “especially after the lawless independence of her present life; but have none of these Homes profited by their non-success, so far as to see the necessity of a change? Have none of the more recently formed been induced by the experience of others to alter their system?”

Thorold shrugged his shoulders. “We human beings are strangely gregarious,” he said; “after the manner of sheep, who will all, one after another, press through the gap the first has made in the hedge, though there is an open gate a little way beyond. These excellent people have religiously followed in each other’s steps; each newly established Refuge receiving its ‘Rules’ and form of discipline from one of the elder Homes. I cannot tell you the vexation with which I hear, when-

ever a new Penitentiary is about to be commenced, that a lady from one of the other Refuges has been sent to teach the persons engaged to work in it the 'proper' system of management, so that each one is firmly planted in the mistakes of its predecessors. However, there is such true love for souls, and such unselfish zeal in those who thus devote themselves to the fallen, that I feel sure in time they will learn a happier mode of dealing with them, and I do not mean to say that even now they are uniformly unsuccessful; far from it. The earnestness and holiness of the workers cannot fail to bring a blessing on the work, and although the souls they have saved are, as I believe, few in comparison with the numbers they might have rescued on a different system, yet the salvation of even one soul is more than worth all that the Home could ever cost; so you must not suppose I would discourage any one from giving them the utmost sympathy and assistance in their power. Whenever one of these unhappy women enters a Penitentiary from any motive sufficiently strong to induce her to bear the irksome rules, the confinement and severity, long enough to let the good teaching she receives awaken some spark of real repentance in her heart, it becomes then possible for her to submit to all that is so galling and depressing as a needful chastisement for her sin, and we must hope that this may be the case with Annie Brook. If you can win her personal love to yourself, you will have done a great deal toward her ultimate rescue: for where the love of God does not exist, human affection is the only other impulse that can work for good within the soul, though in a feeble and uncertain way. It is often allowed to serve as a guide to the higher, purer love, and it can at least ac-

comply with what haughtiness and severity could never effect."

"You do not think then that there is any preference to be given to one of these Homes above another?"

"I think not; they have all the same advantages, and the same defects. I will give you the names of several, and you had better take your charge to the first which has a vacancy. I trust you may not find that in some particular she is not eligible for reception there, according to the rules of admission, which seem to be generally framed with the peculiar property of frustrating the object of the charity, by rendering it scarcely possible for the poor creatures to effect an entrance to the Home built expressly for them. They are very generous in taking them in free of charge, but you will like, no doubt, to offer some payment for Annie, and you will do well, as the funds of all these Refuges are scanty enough, I fear."

Ernestine thought it only right that the girl should be supported at her expense, and having somewhat magnificent notions in such respects, she offered a sum sufficiently large to be of great use to the "Home" where they agreed to take Annie Brook on her application. There was, however, one absolute condition made to her reception, besides various hints as to what would be expected of her, and this was that she should be able to bring with her a certificate of perfect health—about the last thing which one of her class would be likely to find possible. In this emergency Ernestine applied to Dr. Compton, who went at once to the jail to see the girl, and on his return he told Ernestine he considered her in a very feeble and precarious state of health.

"There is no organic complaint at present," he said, "and nothing certainly which need prevent her being received at the Refuge, so that I can give her a certificate; but there is extreme debility and exhaustion of the system, and, like too many of her class, she will die a premature death*on the first occasion when her powers are in any way unusually taxed."

"And can nothing be done to restore her, or prevent such a result?" said Ernestine.

"You can only use preventive means. Quiet, good food, and plenty of fresh air in fine weather, will give her the best chance for life. She must guard against exposure to cold. Whatever happens, you can have the comfort of feeling that if you had not taken her out of her present life she would not have lived six months longer in it."

If anything could have deepened Ernestine's anxiety about the unhappy child, it would have been this opinion. Her time for repentance was likely to be short; how earnestly she trusted nothing would occur to mar it.

The day of Annie's release from prison came at last, and at seven in the morning Ernestine was at the jail to receive her into her own safe keeping. This was the jailer's wise arrangement, for Ernestine, in her ignorance, had been quite ready to let Annie go to her lodgings first, for the various effects she had left there.

"Bless my heart," said old Bolton, when he heard this proposal, "how precious innocent these ladies be, to be sure! Miss Courtenay, if you want to make very sure that you'll never set eyes on Rosie Brown again, you'll just let her go off to Mother Dorrell's when she goes out from here."

"They would not keep her by force, would they?" asked Ernestine.

"They wouldn't need to, for they could soon persuade her to stop; and if so be they couldn't, though that ain't likely, they would just give her a neat little glass of gin to keep her spirits up, and a drop of something besides in it, and she'd be asleep in five minutes, and then, when she woke up, they'd say you had never come for her, and a blessed thing too, for they had found out you were going to shut her up in a place worse than the black-hole; and then they'd say there was a fine new hat some one had brought for her; and see if you or any one else could ever lay a finger on her after that."

"What had I better do then?" said Ernestine.

"Well, I'm bound to let her out by seven in the morning; it's against the law to keep her longer, and you had best be here to take care of her as soon as she is out of my hands. If you take my advice, you'll have her off by the train as fast as ever you can; it's pretty sure there'll be some bad 'un sneaking about outside the jail waiting for her, but they'll not venture to show themselves if she's with you. I'll send a policeman to Mother Dorrell's for her clothes, and he'll take the bundle straight to the railway station, so you'll be all right, if she does not make off on the road."

The Refuge where Annie was to be received was at some distance from Greyburgh, so that Ernestine was well pleased to start early; and having persuaded Mrs. Tompson to go on to London by a later train, she found herself at the jail before seven on a glorious summer morning.

The jailer told her that Rosie Brown was exchanging

her prison-dress for her own clothes, and as Ernestine preferred waiting among the flower-beds, with which the court-yard of the prison was embellished, he gallantly plucked some lily of the valley, which grew under the shade of the high wall, and presented it to her. Then he went in to complete the formularies of Annie Brook's release. Ernestine remained looking at the flowers he had given her, the lovely little snow-white bells showing spotless against the fresh green leaves, still glittering with the early dew; then she gazed up to the cloudless morning sky—one bright expanse of limpid blue—and felt around the cool untainted air, which scarce that day had met the breath of man, and saw in them all but faint reflections of the eternal beauty and purity of the Creative Mind; and there awoke in her soul that intense longing which sometimes overpowers us, for the coming of the sinless kingdom, when the Divine One, who alone passed holy and stainless through this world's pollutions, shall reign in righteousness; when over all the glorious renewed creation there shall not be a blot or shadow, and when through the myriad hosts that then shall live eternally to love Him, there shall not be one who bears upon the soul a taint of evil. "O Lord, how long?" she could have asked, with the souls that were bid to wait in their white robes beneath the heavenly altar till their brethren should be fulfilled; but far off in the inscrutable mystery of the Divine Will that radiant vision lies, and she had only meantime her one brief life wherewith to struggle through her little part in the accomplishment of its desired fulfillment.

The jailer's voice, telling her that his prisoner was delivered over to her, woke her rudely from these

thoughts; and she started in complete astonishment at the sight which presented itself when she looked round. Annie Brook stood in the doorway of the prison, as if in a picture-frame, dressed in a costume in which there could be no doubt she looked strikingly beautiful, but which was much more fitted for the stage than for a walk through the streets to the railway station. A little white hat with a scarlet feather rested lightly on her sunny hair, which fell its whole length in waving masses almost to her waist; and she wore a red cloak of somewhat fantastic shape, over a dress of silver gray. The excitement of the moment had brightened her large blue eyes, and brought a vivid color into her cheeks, contrasting with the waxen white which was now apparently her habitual complexion. . Lovely she certainly looked, but strangely out of keeping with the place and the purpose for which she was equipped; and Ernestine, willing as she was to undergo pain and annoyance on Annie's account, thought with no small dismay of the observation she would excite walking through the streets with such a companion, and there was no longer time to send for a carriage. Mrs. Bolton, however, who came out with the girl, was equal to the occasion. "Ah! I see what you are thinking of, Miss Courtenay. She looks more fit to go and dance as Columbine with Harlequin, than to walk through the streets with a lady like you. Here, gal, you just pull that red feather out of your hat, and put it in your pocket; and take off that flashy cloak, fit to set a bull crazy, and I'll lend you a decent black shawl, which the lady'll send safe back to me, I make no doubt."

"That I certainly will, and thank you very much,"

said Ernestine ; and Annie, flushing crimson, began with feverish haste to obey Mrs. Bolton's direction.

"Here," said the old woman, "give me the cloak, and I'll wrap it in a bundle for you to take with you, and then you'll have it at hand if so be you should want it where you be agoing;" and she winked to Ernestine, with a significance which showed she thought this a piece of exquisite sarcasm. Annie was soon more suitably attired, and walked beside Ernestine down to the gate, which the jailer himself held open for them.

"Good-by, my gal," he said to Annie. "I hope I may never see you here again ; and that's about the best wish I can make for you ; for I've turned the key on some of your sort as good as a hundred times. You go and do whatever that lady tells you first and last, and you may be a bright woman yet. And as to you, ma'am," he added, turning to Ernestine, "if so be I don't happen to see you here again, I'll see you in heaven as sure as I'm alive, for you're as safe to get there as ever was Moses and Aaron, or any of these fine Bible fellows. Bless you, you'll go up as straight as a sky-rocket, you will." With which favorable prediction he closed the gate and left Ernestine alone with her charge.

So long as they were traversing the square in which the jail stood, Annie walked quietly by her side, never looking up, and seeming scarcely to breathe ; but when they got into the streets, she began to gaze from side to side with a quick, restless movement of the eyes, like those of a startled fawn when it comes suddenly from a wood to the open country. Her cheek was flushed, her breathing hurried, and she seemed hardly able to control her nervous excitement. Occasionally, she

gave a sudden glance toward Ernestine, which, if the latter had had a little more experience, might have alarmed her considerably for the safe conduct of her charge; but Ernestine knew nothing of the impulsive, irritable temperament which is induced by such a life as Annie had been leading. As they proceeded on their way to the station, they passed out of the streets, and came to a road where the green fields were to be seen on either side, and Annie's excitement seemed to increase.

"Oh! I wish I were out running in those fields," she exclaimed. "Ma'am, I hope you are not going to shut me up, where you're taking me; I couldn't bear it—indeed I couldn't. There was this good in my life before," she added, "I could do just as I liked, with no one to stop me, whatever I fancied."

"But you see, Annie dear, you did very badly for yourself, when you did as you liked. Where you are going now, you will learn to lead a better life, and you will wonder you could ever bear to do as you have done." Annie seemed scarcely to hear her, so anxiously was she looking round. The station had now appeared in sight.

"We shall be just in time," said Ernestine. "There is the train almost ready to start." At these words the girl made a sudden movement; but at the same moment the little terrier Fury, who was trotting quietly on in front, turned right round and ran furiously at Annie, barking with such violence that she screamed aloud, and flew back to Ernestine, catching hold of her arm in her terror. Ernestine took her hand and quieted the dog, wondering much at his strange violence; and so long as Annie remained close to her side, he made no further

demonstration beyond a watchful glance of his eloquent brown eyes ; but if she moved even a step forward, he barked angrily again, till Annie fairly clung to Ernestine in great trepidation ; and so they reached the station, just in time to take their places in the train before it started. Long afterward, Annie told Ernestine that at the moment the dog barked at her she had, in her longing for freedom, finally made up her mind to run away from her and hide in a house not far off, where she knew Ernestine could never have obtained access to her. By what instinct the dog divined her purpose, and by what mysterious ray of light he knew that he must save her from the dark temptation which assailed her, none can say ; but the fact that a little Skye terrier did, by his sudden barking, stop the flight of a reckless soul to its destruction, is no fiction, but a very truth, to which the poor sinner herself bore witness.

From the moment they entered the railway carriage Annie seemed to resign herself. She sat beside Ernestine, with her hands listlessly folded on her lap, and her head drooping, as if she cared little what became of her. After a time, when they were alone in the carriage, she said :

"Miss Courtenay, does father know poor Lois is dead?"

"Yes, the coroner wrote to him about her, and I saw him myself afterward."

"And was he sorry?"

"I am sure he was, but he did not like to speak of her."

"No, because she had disgraced him, as I have done ;" and tears gathered in her eyes as she spoke. "Father

was often sharp to Lois, because she was so high-spirited, but he was always kind to me. When Lois wrote and bid me come to her, I left a letter, telling him I had only gone to see her. I was a bad girl to go, for I knew father would be vexed; but I never meant to stay; and next day father sent me a letter to say if I'd come back then and there, he'd take me in before my Lady knew I was gone, and look over it; but that he'd never see me again if I went and did as Lois had done. And oh, Miss Courtenay, I did so want to go back to him! and I would have gone, if Mr. Brown would have let me, for all I loved him better than any one else in the world."

"You had known him before, then?" said Ernestine.

"Yes, he was staying at the Hall, and when I went walking he used to come and talk to me, and be so kind to me, and he gave me such a many pretty things, and I loved him with all my heart; but I knew he was a gentleman, far above me, and I tried so hard to forget him; and oh, Miss Courtenay, it was very sweet to see him again at Lois's house! but still, when I got father's letter, I said I would go back; and I knew poor Lois wished it, for she told me she would never have brought me there if she could have helped it; and Mr. Brown overpersuaded me not to go, and said if I'd come with him I should have everything in the world I wished. But still I said I'd go home, ma'am, for I had heard the names Lois had been called in the village, and then Mr. Brown said, Well, I should go then, but he'd drive me himself to the station, and go part of the way with me, and I was pleased at that, for I loved him so it half broke my heart to part with him; and he fetched such a beautiful carriage and horses—I so

enjoyed going out in it with him ! But I remember so well—oh, so well !—as I stood on the doorstep looking at the carriage, Lois came and took tight hold of my hand, and whispered, ‘Annie, don’t go with him ; for the love of God don’t go ; I’ll send and get a cab to take you to the train, and see you off myself!’ And I stood thinking what I should do, when Mr. Brown turned round and held out his hand, looking so smiling and bright, and bid me come, for it was all ready, and we should have such a nice drive to the station ; and I went ; but oh, Miss Courtenay, I’ve thought of that moment over and over again, till I have been almost mad, for it was my last chance. If I’d refused to go with him, and let Lois take me to the train, I’d have gone straight home, and father would have taken me in, and I’d never have brought disgrace on him and ruin on myself ; and I might have been good and happy, and held up my head with the best of them. Oh, if only I could get that moment back again, if only I could !” and she literally writhed on her seat, in the impotent longing for that which could never be hers again while the universe lasted. Poor child, she thought perhaps that none could suffer as she did then ; but there are probably few among us who do not know what it is to look back to some point in our own life, when our destinies in this world, and perhaps in the next, were yet in our hands for good or for ill, and when, in our blindness and madness, we chose the fair-seeming evil, and let the good slip through our fingers forever and forever.’ (Earth has no anguish greater than the hopeless passionate yearning for such a moment to return. It would have been so easy then to have taken a different course—yes, even if it cost a pang ; but now, not

tears of blood, not the rending of soul and body, not the bringing down of heaven with prayers, could give that one omnipotent moment back again! Ernestine saw what she was suffering, and tried gently to soothe her.

"And did Mr. Brown take you to the train?" she said, wishing to draw her thoughts away from the one recollection which seemed to madden her.

"Yes, but not to take me—oh, not to take me home! When we got to the station he said he'd go a bit of the way with me, and I was very, very glad to have him a little longer, but I never doubted I was going straight to father's till I saw the towers of Greyburgh; then he told me he had brought me there because he could not bear to part with me, and he said I couldn't go back now, for father would never take me in after I had gone off like that alone with a gentleman, and Lois couldn't, for he knew she was not going to stay where she was, and that I had not a friend in the world but him now, and I must trust him, for he loved me well; and he said he'd give me a pretty house to live in; and when I still cried, and said I must go to father, he said perhaps some day he'd marry me; and so I stayed with him, and the end of all his love and all his promises has been that now I am in the railway train again, going from a jail to a penitentiary;" and without saying another word she remained silent, shedding hopeless tears, which seemed to give no relief to her aching heart; and Ernestine thought, mournfully, of the awful guilt that surely must one day call for vengeance on the man who could with such dark treachery compass a fellow-creature's ruin. In this world he would walk unchallenged among his equals—respected, it might be—and happy as those can be whom selfishness and worldliness have

hardened into enjoyment of the pleasures of life, even though their existence is weighted with the murder of an immortal soul. That is a crime which on this earth is neither recognized nor punished ; but how will it be when its black hideousness is exposed before the face of Him who sits upon the great white throne ?

Once only Annie spoke again as they went on their way. She lifted up her head, and said to Ernestine, " Miss Courtenay, will you tell father that I have never been called by my own name, so at least I have not brought disgrace on his ? Lois said, when I went there, I should never be called by it, for she had heard how mad it made father to have her spoken of as she was in our village ; so when Mr. Brown asked her my name, for he had not heard it at the Hall, she said he might call me what he pleased, for he should never know my true name any more than hers. She called herself Mrs. George, so he said then he'd call me Rosie, for I was just like a rose ; and I had on a brown dress, so he said I should be Rosie Brown, and he'd be Mr. Brown. I don't know now what his own name was, but he never knew mine."

" I will tell your father, dear Annie ; I am sure he will be glad to know that you are going to a safe home now."

At length the painful journey was over, and Ernestine and her charge had reached the door of the Refuge.

" Oh, Miss Courtenay, if only you were going to stay with me !" said Annie, clinging to her as they stood waiting. " I love you, and I'd do anything for you, but I am afraid of being shut up here."

The door was opened by a lady, who locked it again so soon as they were inside ; and as Ernestine gave her

name, she glanced at Annie, saying, "The penitent, I suppose?" Then she opened the door of a small room, and told Annie to wait there till she could attend to her. The girl did as she was told, and was locked in; and Ernestine was then conducted through various long and somewhat gloomy corridors to a large comfortable sitting-room. Here her guide left her, to call the lady who superintended the establishment; and this latter soon made her appearance. She was very courteous and kind to Ernestine herself, but she listened to her account of Annie Brook with a certain sternness, and did not seem to think there was so much excuse for her as Ernestine was disposed to find in the circumstances of her ruin. It was evident, too, that she gave not the slightest weight to Miss Courtenay's anxious explanations of Annie's impulsive and sensitive disposition, which would make her so easily led by any appeal to her affections, and so fatally repelled by harshness.

"We treat all our penitents alike, of course," she said calmly; "I cannot undertake to show any special favor to this girl."

"I should not think of asking you to do so," said Ernestine, "only, individual temperament must surely be considered in the manner in which they are spoken to, and in their treatment in all that concerns themselves separately?"

"Our rules embrace the whole course of their management, and to them we adhere."

"But your object is to save individual souls. Surely you leave yourselves the power of such relaxation as may sometimes be required by special circumstances?"

"Our first consideration must be the general good of the penitents and the peace of the house, which can

only be attained by strict conformity to rule ; also," she added, with a smile which was gently disdainful, "from what you tell me of your wishes with regard to this penitent, I am not disposed to think that our views would be the same as to the most fitting mode of treatment for her."

"You have experience and I have none," said Ernestine courteously. "In any case, I am sure you will do your best for this poor child. Circumstances have caused me to take a deep interest in her, and I feel very anxious for her future. I am afraid I must go now, however, leaving her in your safe keeping, for I must travel to town by the express."

"I am sorry to detain you, but I must beg you to wait a few minutes. I have sent one of the ladies to read the rules to Annie Brook ; and it must depend, of course, on her promising to abide by them whether I can retain her in the house."

"Oh, I trust they are not very formidable !" exclaimed Ernestine ; "she is so timid and excitable that she is very likely to be dismayed at first by what might afterward seem easy to her."

"No penitent is admitted who does not promise to comply with the rules," was the inflexible answer. Presently there came a light knock at the door, and the lady went out. In a few minutes she returned :

"I am very sorry to distress you, Miss Courtenay, but I fear you must take this young woman back with you. She has refused to give the necessary promise that she will stay two years."

"Oh, surely she is not obliged to promise that at present?" exclaimed Ernestine. "Of course, it is all new and strange to her. She cannot possibly tell whether

she would be content to remain two years. I do not think any one could do so on first entering upon a life of which they knew nothing."

"It is our rule," was the lady's answer.

Ernestine was in despair. "Will you let me talk to her, and perhaps I can persuade her to say what you would wish?"

"Certainly," said the lady, and she was conducted back through the long corridors to the little room where Annie was sitting in a corner, crying as if her heart would break. She flew to Ernestine the moment she saw her:

"Oh, Miss Courtenay, take me away from here. I shall never be able to bear it. They say I must promise to stay two whole years, and that's just like a lifetime. I can't promise to let myself be shut up among strangers all that while; and there's such a many things I am to do and I am not to do, I am frightened to death at it all. Tell them to let me out. I must go away."

"But, Annie dear," said Ernestine soothingly, "where would you go to? I am sure you don't want to go back to your wickedness, and it is impossible for you to get an honest living anywhere without a character. I am sure you could not bring yourself to go to the workhouse if you went out from here, could you?"

"O no, no!" said Annie, shuddering.

"Well, that is the only other place where you could be safe from the sin that is bringing you to destruction. Surely you will say that you will try and stay two years, rather than let yourself be drawn away again from the merciful God who is calling you to repentance?"

"I don't want to do wrong again," said Annie; "but I can't promise to stay in this place two years."

"Annie, it would be better to die than do wrong. Yes," she continued, as the girl looked up surprised, "it would be better to die in any tortures than to sin against our Father in heaven, for our Saviour tells us Himself not to fear those who can only kill the body, and then have nothing more that they can do, but to fear Him who has power to cast both soul and body into hell. Annie, think of Lois. Her body is lying in the cold grave, and her soul is gone to wait the dreadful judgment day. If she could come back to earth again, do you not think she would be only too thankful to have two years, or twenty, or a thousand given her in this house for repentance? Oh, my dear child, what need it matter to any of us what we have to bear in our short lives here, if only we find mercy with our dear Lord at the last? He died to save you: will you not suffer a little to go to Him?"

"Oh, Miss Courtenay, I could bear anything if you were going to stay with me."

"But I will come and see you often, Annie dear, and I will write to you. Now, you will let me tell the ladies you will try and stay two years, will you not?"

"I would do anything to please you," said Annie; and Ernestine went at once for the lady, who was in the next room, and having returned with her to Annie, she told her the girl would try and stay two years.

"You must not only try, you must do it," said the lady very decidedly; and then Ernestine took leave of Annie, with a warm pressure of the hand and a few words of kind encouragement, to which the poor girl's sobs prevented her from making any answer. Ernestine caught the last look of her blue eyes wistfully turned toward her as the door closed, and she could not resist

a final entreaty to the lady, to treat with as much indulgence as she could one of so impressible and affectionate a disposition. "I forgot, too, to tell you that the doctor who wrote her certificate considers her in a very feeble state. He does not think she can live long."

"That is very likely," said the lady. "It has been proved by statistics that the average length of these girls' career is from four to five years; but the good food and quiet of this house may do much for her."

Ernestine then quitted the Refuge, knowing that she left Annie in safety for the present, and it was with a feeling of intense thankfulness that she looked back over all the difficulties she had surmounted, and felt that she had been thus far able to keep the pledge she had given to the dead.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CLOUDS BEGIN TO GATHER.

THE month which followed this day of anxiety was one of such deep happiness to Ernestine Courtenay that the memory of it haunted her to the very hour of her death. She tasted then to the full the sweetness which the human heart can sometimes know even in this perishing world. Long after, when all the sunshine had faded out of her life, and existence lay around her like a dim landscape, at eventide, where the shadows fall heavily on earth, and the only brightness is in the sunset gleam which seems to open a vista to the purer land, the thought of that little time of exquisite joy would come back to her, as in the gloom of a northern winter the recollection returns of the perfumes and beauty of a southern clime. She had no misgivings while the bright weeks were passing that it was happiness too great to last, nor did she seem to hear, as some have done, the footsteps of the coming sorrow echoing down the long dim aisles of the future. She gave herself up to the trusting love which filled her heart, and let it flood her whole being with its ineffable joys. There was not a shadow on the radiance with which it surrounded her; not a doubt, not a fear. The undercurrent of sadness which the thought of both her brothers would ever leave for her beneath all the enjoyments of this world, had not power to mar the intense

personal happiness which she found in Hugh Lingard's love. He had from the first been passionately attached to her, but there was an inexplicable change in his bearing toward her, which was calculated to have the deepest charm for one so gentle and warm-hearted as Ernestine Courtenay. There was a tender reverence in his manner now, a loving devotion which was unwearied in seeking how to please her. He seemed to hang on every word she spoke, as if he longed to learn from her on all points, and to bring his very thoughts into accordance with hers, if that were possible. He did not now, any more than formerly, make professions of religious faith, and Ernestine's own convictions on that subject had greatly deepened since she had of late been brought so near to some of the great mysteries of the soul, in life and in death; but she had ever believed Hugh Lingard to be good, and pure, and chivalrous as the knights of old, and she hoped now, more than ever, that he did hold a true religion in the hidden depths of his spirit, though he mistrusted himself too much to show it openly, and that it yet would find its full development in the life they hoped to lead together. In this she was deceived. Whatever change there was in Hugh Lingard had not sprung from any clearer perception of the truth of God than that to which he had attained when she first became engaged to him.

Very little was said between them on the subject of Annie Brook. Ernestine had fulfilled her promise of keeping Lingard *au courant* of her proceedings at Greyburgh, but of course the subject was one on which it was painful to her to speak; and after having told him that her mind was now at rest in the knowledge that the poor child was safe in the Refuge, she said no more,

and Hugh Lingard himself never alluded to the subject. Her account of Reginald's state of mind before his death confirmed him in his original belief, that it was as a victim of this young brother Ernestine had felt bound to find the girl out. Ernestine had purposely avoided ever giving Mr. Brown's name in any of her letters, as she thought it not unlikely, since he had been her brother George's friend, that Hugh might also have some slight acquaintance with him ; and she was too honorable to reveal the dark secrets of a man's hidden life, acquired in such a manner. There was a vein of sadness in all Hugh Lingard said which touched her very much, and which she had never known in him before ; but she only labored the more earnestly to show how entirely she would care for his happiness when it became her first earthly duty. The preparations for their marriage were now going on rapidly, and it had been fixed to take place in three months from the time of Ernestine's return to London. And so the golden hours floated on for Ernestine, brightened with sweetest hope, and precious already by the human sympathy which has so marvelous a charm for every living heart. Then suddenly came the first mutterings of the gathering storm, though she failed to perceive their import.

One day, when she was sitting alone in the drawing-room, her aunt having gone out, the mid-day post brought her a letter from the Refuge. It contained the news that Annie Brook had the evening before made her escape from the Home. She had, the writer stated, been gradually growing more and more restless, and had shown symptoms of rebellion against some of the rules, especially the "silence times." These, the writer explained, were periods during the day when entire

silence was enforced on the penitents, as a form of discipline, and when they were required to perform their various duties in each other's society without the utterance of a single word. To this Annie had objected, on what the lady termed the "unreasonable ground" that "she could not bear her own thoughts." The half-hour between 1 and 1.30 was divided between "mid-day prayers and recreation,"—the only recreation allowed during the day, and on having been summoned from this brief respite to enter upon the afternoon "silence time," Annie had refused to obey. For this act of disobedience she was locked up in the "punishment-room," and sentenced to remain there on a diet of bread and water till she was properly humbled. When visited in the evening it was found that she had made her escape through the window, at the risk of breaking her neck. Nothing had been heard of her since, and the letter concluded with the announcement that even if she were found, she could never again be received at the Home, as Miss Courtenay, no doubt, would easily understand.

Ernestine's first impulse was to fling the letter from her, and clasp her hands in dismay, while something like a groan escaped her. Had it then all been in vain? Had all her efforts, her longings, her endurance been useless after all? Was the unhappy child lost whom she had so struggled to save from destruction? A pang of keen remorse shot through her heart: was it perhaps her own fault after all? She knew that Annie loved her, and she remembered how Thorold had warned her that a human affection was almost the only influence which could be brought to bear on a heart still dead to the love of God: had she not too long neglected to use

her power over that wayward soul ? She had promised to go and see her ; Annie had depended upon it ; and she had let a whole month slip by in the golden light of her own deep happiness, which had seemed to hide from her charmed eyes all the darkness and sorrow of the world without. She had written to the girl, it was true, but it was one of the rules of the Home that the penitents were to write letters only once a month, so that Annie had never yet had the opportunity of telling her whether she were contented with her position or not.

There are few, probably, of those who think deeply, who have not known at times a feeling of overwhelming dismay and almost terror at the thought of the whole world lying in wickedness round them, while they are living in quiet and comfort, full of their own hopes and fears, and lifting not so much as a finger to stem the awful tide of woe and sin which is forever engulfing so many deathless spirits in its fatal depths. Such a feeling, fraught with keenest remorse, plunged Ernestine's very soul in anguish now, for it came with the special sting which the thought of Annie Brook's fatal disappearance had power to give it. Here had been one, but one soul, out of the myriads daily perishing, given for its salvation into her own hands by the marked providence of God, and she had carelessly let it slip from her grasp. She had neglected, she had lost it ! She had been wrapped in her own selfish love, intoxicated with her own selfish happiness. She had been reveling in hours of joy, in all that makes this world most dear. She had left that poor, weak, fainting soul to battle alone in the bitter waters of repentance till she made shipwreck among them, while the only friend she loved was not at hand to save her. Oh how Ernestine

hated and despised herself as she thought of it,—she who had let her own sweet moments of earthly bliss weigh heavier in the balance than the eternal safety of that immortal! Probably she blamed herself too severely, and the fault did not in actual fact lie with her in this particular instance; but it is in truth a problem whose solution we well may dread, how far the souls that have perished round us may not rise up in judgment against us at the last for the doom which, but for supineness and easy selfishness, we might, perhaps, have averted. Ernestine could not, however, long endure the thoughts that pierced her heart; they goaded her to immediate action. Annie Brook at least still lived, and find her she must, though all her own life were spent in the search. She concluded that the girl would return to Greyburgh, and she determined to seek her there without an hour's delay. She knew that her doing so would be even more violently opposed by her aunt than on the former occasion, for Mrs. Thompson's account of her proceedings there had been by no means palatable to that lady, and therefore she resolved to start before Lady Beaufort's return home; while much as she would have wished to have seen Lingard before leaving him for an indefinite period, she dreaded, if she stayed to tell him of her plans, meeting the look of sadness in the eyes which followed her so lovingly wherever she went. She knew that he would not oppose any wish of hers, however much he might regret her departure, so she decided to leave a letter for him without waiting for the hour of his daily visit.

In a short time, therefore, Ernestine was in the train, taking with her only her maid; but from the station she telegraphed to Mrs. Berry, the nurse who had at-

tended Reginald in his last illness, and told her to take lodgings for her, as she did not wish to go to a hotel alone. Poor Ernestine carried an aching heart with her on her journey. It had cost her a bitter pang to break up her present happiness, and separate herself from her future husband, who seemed to grow each day more dear to her; and who in this changing life can ever part with a time of joy without dreading that such another may never dawn for them again? The loss of Annie Brook, too, weighed heavily on her spirit; the search for her had been a bitter and a painful task, and if the poor girl had gone back to her evil life, it had all been worse than useless. Then, as the fair towers of Greyburgh came in sight, glistening in the evening sun, the remembrance of Reginald's unhappy death seemed to shroud it for her in sudden darkness, so fatal had this place, his so-called *Alma Mater*, been to him.

It was a comfort to see at the station the kind, motherly face of Mrs. Berry, who was waiting to conduct her to her lodgings, but even she had her tale of sadness on this occasion. The good woman was, as she expressed it, very "down-hearted." She had strained herself in the last case of illness she had attended, and was for the present, and probably for the rest of her life, incapacitated from continuing her employment as sick-nurse. As it was all she had to depend on for a livelihood, this was a serious calamity for her, and her delight and gratitude knew no bounds when Ernestine told her she should remain with her till she was better, and that she would find means to make her useful in some light work. Ernestine's gentleness and sweetness had won on the nurse unspeakably during the time of Reginald's illness, and the idea of being with her or near her in

any way was the greatest happiness she could have known. Having made Mrs. Berry happy was, however, the only gleam of comfort poor Ernestine had for the next few days. Her first thought was to take counsel with Thorold as to the best means of once more finding Annie, but to her dismay she heard from Mrs. Berry that he was in London, having undertaken a six weeks' duty for an overworked perpetual curate in one of the most crowded districts. Mrs. Berry affirmed that he had done this solely that he might "work himself a bit harder" than he could do in Greyburgh just at present, when all the schools had holidays, and most of the people of the poorest class were out at work in the fields. He was not to return for some time, so Ernestine's next resource was to go to the old jailer for advice, and early next morning she was once more at the jail. Bolton was very glad to see her, but he shook his head when he heard her errand.

"It's a cruel pity they could not keep her when they had got her, for I doubt you'll not soon set eyes on her again. They should have coaxed her a bit. Rosie Brown would do anything on earth for a kind word, but she was scared in a moment if you were any-ways harsh to her. However, she's gone, and the job now is to find her, and that won't be easy. She'd never come back here, you may depend. She'd be too much afraid of being took up and sent back to the 'ten-tiary."

"But where can she be then?"

"Most likely in London; she was nearer there than here, and it's where most of them makes their way to sooner or later."

"London!" Ernestine's heart sank within her. How

hopeless any search would be in London she knew well. "Oh, I must hope she is here," she said; "is there no way of finding out?"

"Oh, I'll find out for you right enough," said the jailer; "Rosie's known now, and I'll send one of our police to look for her. He is as cute a chap as you'd wish to see, and he'll soon find out if she is in Grey-burgh. If you'll come round here to-morrow, Miss Courtenay, I'll undertake to tell you whether she's in this town or no."

There was nothing to be done but to wait through the dreary day, and dreary enough it was to poor Ernestine. She went to look at Reginald's grave, on which the grass was already green. Truly his place knew him no more; his name was but a memory, his life as a tale that is told. But where was the deathless soul that had shivered so long in its darkness, without hope or stay, on the brink of the eternity that held him now? As she thought upon him her whole heart rose up in one earnest supplication, that even yet the love of Christ, higher than the highest heaven and deeper than the deepest hell, might reach him wheresoever he might be, and therein she obeyed the irresistible instinct which burns in the heart of every one, be their creed what it may, who have seen their beloved pass into the mystery of the unseen life.

CHAPTER XX.

MRS. DORRELL.

ERNESTINE COURTENAY was at the prison next day before the appointed time, in her anxiety to know the result of the policeman's search. The consequence of her early arrival was, that she found Mr. Bolton performing some occult ceremonies as the conclusion to his toilet, which it seemed always took place in the sitting-room, and during which Mrs. Bolton ministered to him with great assiduity. He was in nowise disconcerted, however, by Ernestine's entrance, but seemed, on the contrary, to think his appearance rather imposing, as he sat with a huge napkin suspended round his neck. He had redeemed his promise of ascertaining whether Annie Brook were in the town or not, and had discovered that she positively was not in Greyburgh, and had not been there since the day she left it with a "lady." Ernestine sat in mute despair. What was she to do next?

"I doubt you'll have a tough job looking for her now, Miss Courtenay," said Bolton; "but the policeman told me one thing which may help you: it's more than likely that some one at Mother Dorrell's knows where she is, for the postman delivered a letter there which had the postmark of Layton." This was the village where the Home was situated, and Ernestine caught eagerly at the chance it afforded of finding out where Annie had gone.

"Oh, how do you think I could induce them to tell me about her?"

"There's only one chance, and that is, if you choose to pay them down a good round sum for the information?"

"I will pay them anything they please," exclaimed Ernestine.

"Bless me! don't you go for to tell them that," said Bolton; "they'd please to ruin you if they could; it's a shame that a penny of honest money should ever get into their hands, let alone your giving them their choice of the quantity."

"Well, do tell me how to proceed," said Ernestine, rather impatiently. "I only want to find the girl, and I don't care what it costs to learn where she is."

"I don't say as you will be able to learn," said Bolton gravely, "and certainly not unless you are uncommon sharp, for they'll do their best to deceive you for the sake of their trade in the long run. But as the girl is positively not at Mother Dorrell's, it cannot make any real difference to her that you should know where she is; and if she finds she can't get your money otherwise, perhaps she may tell you."

"Was the letter written to her?" asked Ernestine.

"No, it was to one of the gals, but the postman could not remember the name. It's Mother Dorrell you'll have to deal with, however. She's a regular tyrant among them, and she's sure to have read the letter before the girl got it. She would only let her have it if it contained what pleased her."

"Then I suppose I had better go to her at once," said Ernestine. The intense repugnance she felt to the idea of seeing this woman prompted her to nerve herself to the task without delay.

"I think it is your only chance, Miss Courtenay. You had better just offer her a sum down to tell you where the gal is; but you must make her understand she'll not get it unless you have proof positive that she's telling you the truth. She'll take you in if she can, you may depend."

With this consolatory assurance, Ernestine left the jail to go at once on her errand. It was by far the most painful effort she had made yet for Annie Brook. Her regret for what her sensitive conscience considered her neglect of her, made her feel as if she ought to rejoice in any pain which she could now endure for her sake; but her whole being revolted at the thought of being brought in contact with the wretched woman who was so infinitely more vile and guilty than the unhappy girls she harbored in her home. Ernestine took Mrs. Berry with her, feeling that she really could not approach this den of wickedness alone, and she was forcibly reminded of the governor's description of her probable reception on arriving there.

There was nothing externally to indicate that the house was otherwise than respectable, but she knocked a long time at the door before she was admitted, while the sound of a window closing rapidly showed that she had been reconnoitered from above. At last the door was opened, and the woman in widow's dress, whom she had been told to expect, appeared. Ernestine looked upon her face, and actually shivered with the intense repulsion it caused her, though it was not in the least the villainous sort of face she expected to see. The forehead was broad and high, surmounted by false braids, from under which a few white hairs straggled out; the eyes were small, keen, and light in color; the

nose high and pinched ; the lips so thin that they formed a mere snaky line across her face. Her complexion was a dead white, in spite of her being, as Ernestine was afterward told, about the hardest drinker in Greyburgh, and her expression was one of extreme meekness and suavity. Yet, in some indefinable way, this face conveyed an impression of wickedness, treachery, and cruelty, far beyond what words can describe. Were it the account of some fictitious character which was being given, doubtless invention would have sought for some more marked features of evil in the outward aspect, to convey the idea of subtle malignant iniquity which that white hypocritical face betrayed. But it is the face of a woman probably still living which has been described, and the simple truth has been told as to the impression it conveyed to those who looked on it. The subsequent acts of this wretched woman are also true, almost impossible as they may appear ; unless voluntary witnesses have lied needlessly against her. Conquering the shrinking horror she felt, Ernestine said :

"Mrs. Dorrell, I wish to speak to you for a few minutes on a matter about which I am anxious." The woman did not move out of the doorway. She dropped a slow, profound curtsy, and, speaking in a soft, smooth voice, with an accent and a choice of words which seemed far above her station, said, "I think, madam, you must be mistaken ; I do not think you can have any business with me ; perhaps you wish to see the person next door."

"No, it is yourself I wish to speak to. I think you can give me some information for which I am willing to pay highly."

"Oh ! pray come in then, madam," she said at once,

and making way for Ernestine and Mrs. Berry to enter, she closed the door carefully behind her, and led the way into a small parlor, furnished in a gaudy style, with some prints on the wall which were not of the most edifying description. Two little children, one almost an infant, sat huddled together in a corner. They looked haggard and wasted, and when Mrs. Dorrell came in they hid their faces as if in an agony of terror. Mrs. Berry had her eyes on them at once, and the look was instantly observed by the woman.

"Pretty dears," she said; "I hope they will not disturb you, madam. They are the children of a young friend of mine, a most respectable married woman, who is unable at present to have them at home on account of her weak health. I am so doatingly fond of children, I was pleased to take care of them for her."

"They will not disturb me," said Ernestine, looking compassionately on the poor terrified children, whom Mrs. Berry was already coaxing to come near her. "Now, Mrs. Dorrell," she said, going straight to her subject, "I am anxious to know where a young girl is, known by the name of Rosie Brown. She lodged here at one time, but she is not in Greyburgh now. She has written, however, within the last two days, to some one in this house, and I will pay any one well who will bring me correct information as to where she is."

"Rosie Brown!" said Mrs. Dorrell, putting on a reflective air. "Ah! I remember now—a poor, friendless young girl, whom I allowed to take shelter here for a few days until I should be able to find a situation for her. I grieve to say, madam, she turned out very worthless; in fact, so loose a character that I could not retain her in my respectable house. I was obliged to

dismiss her. I regretted doing it, but I had my reputation to consider. The humblest among us, madam, prizes a good name."

This was more than Ernestine could endure. "It is quite useless to speak to me in this way, Mrs. Dorrell. The point is, will you tell me where the girl is, or not?"

"I think you mentioned a reward for the trouble of ascertaining?" she said, in a cringing tone.

"I will give you five pounds at once, if you can bring me proof positive that your information is correct."

The woman's eyes glistened. "Well, madam, I am sure I will gladly assist you in any work of charity. I will endeavor to ascertain where the girl is, and, if you will allow me to call upon you this evening, I will give you her correct address."

"Can I not have it now?" asked Ernestine.

"Unfortunately I do not know it. You are mistaken in supposing any letter came to this house. I live here alone-with these sweet children; but I will endeavor to ascertain for you, though it will cost me no doubt some hours' toil."

Ernestine felt certain that the woman knew the address at the moment she spoke perfectly well; but her smooth lying face was quite imperturbable, and feeling thankful to escape from so odious a presence, she hurriedly wrote down the address of her own lodging, and rose to go.

Mrs. Berry meanwhile had been fondling the two poor little children, and as she got up they clung to her with their puny hands, and seemed unwilling to let her go. Ernestine saw Mrs. Dorrell give them a look so vindictive, that she wished she could have carried away the unhappy infants then and there; but she was learning daily more and more the bitter lesson, that we must

ever in this life walk amidst sorrow and pain we have no power to alleviate. As Ernestine came out into the little passage, she saw a door at the end of it partly open, and a young woman, who was standing behind it, looked eagerly round to catch a glimpse of her as she passed. Ernestine half stopped, feeling convinced she had seen that handsome, mournful face before, though she could not recall it at first. The quick glance of recognition from the girl's dark eyes, however, reminded her that she was the one among the band of prisoners at the jail who had whispered to her where Annie Brook really was, and whose name the jailer had told her afterward was Nellie Lewis. Before she had time to say a word, however, Mrs. Dorrell had detected the girl's presence, and pushed the door back upon her so violently that Ernestine heard her give a cry as if hurt.

"My servant-girl, madam," said Mrs. Dorrell. "I am shocked at her impertinence to stand staring at you in that way."

Ernestine felt it was in vain to contradict the woman's incessant lies, and she went out in silence. Mrs. Berry was still looking wistfully at the poor little children, who, at a glance from Mrs. Dorrell, had cowered down in their corners, and Ernestine and she had not walked many steps down the street when they heard a shriek of pain from a childish voice in the house they had left.

"Oh, Miss Courtenay, that's a wicked woman!" said Mrs. Berry.

"Indeed, I am sure she is," said Ernestine. "Whose children do you suppose them to be?"

"Ah! there's little doubt what they are, poor babes. They are the children of some of these unfortunate girls, who pay Mrs. Dorrell for taking care of them; but I'm

sure she cruelly ill uses them, and indeed I've heard that the children left in these houses always die."

"For want of food and care, no doubt," said Ernestine.

Mrs. Berry looked as if she could have told more, but shrank from doing so. Presently, however, she said: "It passes me to understand, Miss Courtenay, how it is that the people who make laws and govern the country can allow such places as Mrs. Dorrell's to be kept openly in the town. They are perfect nests of wickedness, such as the heathen lands I have read about might be ashamed of; and I am sure of this, they're the ruin of thousands of souls, for they lure every young girl they can catch into them; and many a one, if they've lost their character or their place anyhow, would turn and do better, if they had no such house as that to fly to."

"I thought there was some law against them," said Ernestine, "but it does not seem to be enforced."

"Bless you! it's a law that's of no sort of use," said Mrs. Berry. "It's just this: If any of the neighbors chooses to go and accuse such people as Mrs. Dorrell of keeping a riotous house that's a nuisance to the street, some notice would be taken of it, but there's not one would dare to do such a thing. It would be as much as their life's worth. It's the police should have the power to go and rout them out; and it's just a mystery to me why they, or the magistrates, or some one, don't take it in hand."

This is no less a mystery to wiser people than good Mrs. Berry. These houses are notorious, carried on openly in the face of day; and how is it that in this Christian country they are allowed thus to exist untouched, poisoning the whole community with the propagation of the deadliest evil?

Ernestine could give no solution to a question which seemed to her inexplicable; and she asked Mrs. Berry if she thought it likely Mrs. Dorrell would really tell her where Annie Brook was to be found.

"I am sure she won't tell you the truth if she can help it, Miss Courtenay. These wretches always consider it a loss to their trade when a girl goes into a Penitentiary. But if she can't get your money otherwise, perhaps she will."

It was just what the jailer said, and Ernestine waited impatiently for nine o'clock, the hour fixed by Mrs. Dorrell for her visit. It was then almost dark, and punctually to the time the woman's knock was heard at the door. She came stealing into the room with a noiseless step. Ernestine was alone; and she bade her sit down, and asked eagerly if she could now tell her where Rosie Brown was.

"Yes, madam, I am happy to say I have been successful in my search, on which I have been employed all day, and I feel much exhausted. Madam, my strength is not what it was."

Ernestine did not in the least understand that this was a hint for the offer of a glass of spirits, and if she had, she would not have given it, so she only said somewhat impatiently, "Let me have the address, then."

"I will, madam. Of course, I know I can depend upon receiving the reward so soon as it is in your possession?"

"Provided there is sufficient proof that you are giving me correct information."

"I am grieved that you should doubt me, madam; but you will see that there is no occasion. Here is the address;" and she read it from a piece of paper: "Rosie

Brown, or, more properly, Annie Brook, is at the house of Matthew Brook, lodge-keeper to Lord Carleton, Carleton Park, Garsley."

Ernestine started in extreme surprise. That was unquestionably the address of Annie's father, and no invention of Mrs. Dorrell's. Nor was it at all unlikely that Annie had longed to return to her father when she left the Penitentiary. Ernestine felt sure that she hated her former life, and that her position at Mrs. Dorrell's had really been one of galling bondage, to which she would not now be willing to return if she could find a shelter anywhere else. She had dreaded the confinement and discipline of the Penitentiary, and had proved unable to bear it; and therefore Ernestine did not look on her escape from it as any proof that she wished to return to her evil ways. If, indeed, she desired to lead a better life, her father's house was the most natural place to which she could go; but it did astonish her that she should have attempted it, knowing how completely he had disowned her. It was possible, however, that she had made a desperate venture, and gone actually to his door, in the hope that he would not turn her away; and it was also possible that he might take some steps to place her in safety, even if he dared not himself brave Lady Carleton's anger by receiving her into his house. In any case, the address was a true one; and therefore Mrs. Dorrell was entitled to her reward, which Ernestine forthwith gave her. She naturally expected the woman to go so soon as she had received the money, and certainly she did not desire to breathe the same air with her a moment longer than was necessary; but Mrs. Dorrell lingered, evidently for some set purpose of her own, although she talked of nothing

more important than the weather and the crops. Out of patience at last, Ernestine rose and called Mrs. Berry to show her out; but even then she remained in the passage, endeavoring to keep up a conversation with the good old nurse, who gave her the sulkiest of answers, and tried several times to get her out at the door in vain. At length, however, the clock struck ten; and then, as if she had only been waiting for this, she instantly left the house and hastened away.

Ernestine at once sat down and wrote to Matthew Brook, begging him to let her know where Annie was, and saying everything she thought likely to soften him toward the poor forlorn child. She thought it best to wait for the answer in Greyburgh; in case Annie, repulsed from her home, might yet return there.

In the course of the next afternoon, Ernestine was sitting in her room, writing her daily letter to Hugh Lingard, when Mrs. Berry, who had been out on some business of her own, burst in, in a state of the greatest agitation, her eyes full of tears, and her hands trembling—"O Miss Courtenay! such a dreadful thing has happened; it makes my flesh creep, it do! Poor little dears! Only to think—it is too shocking!"

"What do you mean, dear Mrs. Berry?" said Ernestine, unable to comprehend these incoherent expressions. Mrs. Berry's only answer was to sit down and cry. "Do tell me," said Ernestine, taking her hand soothingly. With an effort, the good old woman composed herself and said, drying her eyes: "It is these two poor little children we saw at Mrs. Dorrell's yesterday, ma'am; they were burnt alive in their beds last night."

"Burnt! Do you mean that they are dead?"

"Indeed they are, ma'am; quite dead. They had an inquest on them this forenoon; and I saw one of the jury; he told me all about it." Ernestine sat down, trembling from head to foot. A horror for which she could hardly account took possession of her.

"Tell me the particulars, Mrs. Berry," she said.

"Ma'am, I am afraid it will shock you very much; but it was while that vile woman was here that it happened. She said in her evidence that she was here from nine o'clock to ten; that she could bring you and me as witnesses of it; that she left them alive, and came back to find them dead."

"Did she mean that it happened in consequence of her having left them to come here?" said Ernestine, growing very pale.

"That's what she says, ma'am; but it seems a strange story altogether. She says she put them to bed before she went, and that the eldest of them must have got up and taken the matches off the mantle-shelf to play with, and so set fire to the bed."

"How was it the house did not take fire if the bed was burnt?" said Ernestine.

"It was only a straw mattress laid on the middle of the stone floor in the back kitchen, and there was no other furniture in the room at all, so when the mattress burnt out, the fire died away; but it killed the children first, poor little lambs!"

"But they must have screamed, poor things!—did no one hear them?"

"There was only one of the girls at home, at the back part of the house. She did hear them, and went to the door, but it was locked, and she could not get in; and the poor innocents did not cry long; I dare say

they were soon dead!" and Mrs. Berry's tears began to flow again.

"It is the most dreadful thing I ever heard of," said Ernestine, with quivering lips. "What was the verdict of the coroner's jury?"

"Accidental death, ma'am; but I think it's a dark business altogether. I can't abide the looks of that woman, and it seems strange her making so much of being here with you; and as to the poor little thing getting up to fetch matches, I believe he was too scared to have moved an inch from where she put him."

"Then how do you suppose it happened, Mrs. Berry?" said Ernestine.

Before she could answer there was a hurried knock at the outer door; presently the servant came to say that a young person wished to speak to Miss Courtenay; and forthwith ushered in a tall woman, somewhat gaudily dressed, but with a thick black veil over her face. Ernestine at once recognized the girl who had looked so wistfully at her the day before at Mrs. Dorrell's.

"May I speak with you alone, ma'am?" she said, in a low voice.

"Certainly," said Ernestine; and Mrs. Berry, taking the hint, left the room. The girl threw back her veil, and showed a pale worn face, still singularly handsome, and eyes swollen with tears.

"Ma'am, may I ask you to promise never to tell any one what I am going to say? I want to speak freely to you if I may."

"Indeed you may," said Ernestine; and never doubting that her visitor's confidence would be about herself alone, she willingly gave the promise she asked. The girl thanked her, and then in a low sad tone went on: "I

wished to tell you, ma'am, first, that Mrs. Dorrell has deceived you about Rosie Brown: she is not at her father's."

"Is it possible?" said Ernestine. "But how then could Mrs. Dorrell have known the address? She was correct as to that."

"She saw it in a letter Rosie had received when she was at home, and which Mrs. Dorrell took out of her box when she went to jail. She made sure you would believe her, and give her the money, if she said Rosie had gone to her father; and she boasted to us all how she had taken you in last night."

"But where is the poor child, then—can you tell me?"

"Yes, ma'am, I can; for the letter she wrote when she left the Penitentiary was to me. Mrs. Dorrell read it before she would let me have it; but I got it at last. I brought it with me, that you might read it yourself, and see I have no wish to deceive you."

"I am sure you have not," said Ernestine, who was much struck by the sorrowful, subdued manner in which the poor girl spoke. She anxiously took the letter, which was dated the day of Annie's flight from the Home, from whence she had probably taken the paper and envelope. It ran thus:

"DEAR NELL,—I write you these few lines to tell you that I have left the Penitentiary. You would hear Miss Courtenay took me there from the jail. She was such a dear lady. I did love her. I tried to stay in that place to please her, for I knew she would grieve if I left; but I could not bear it, not another day. I am going now to London to try and get work, for I won't

do as I have done, never no more. I hate to think as ever I lived a gay life. You know I never was happy in it, and I would not go back to it now for all the world. I would go to that dear lady, if I were not afraid she would want me to go to a Penitentiary again, and I couldn't do that. So I must do the best I can. Surely in such a big place as London there will be some work for me. I write this to ask you, Nell, to take a letter out of my box, which was sent me when I was at home, and keep it safe for me; for I am afraid Mrs. Dorrell will sell all my things when she finds I don't mean to come back, and I don't want to lose that letter. It is the last my sister Lois ever wrote to me; and she's dead now—poor Lois! I often wish I were dead too. So no more at present from your friend,

“ROSIE BROWN.”

“But there is no address given here,” said Ernestine in alarm. “She only says she is going to London. Do you know no more than this?”

“No, ma'am; I only had that one letter, and I know nothing of her but what she tells me in it.”

“She must have written it immediately on leaving the Home, and posted it at the village, for I see it has that post-mark; and then I suppose she went on to London. But how shall I ever find her there? Poor Annie, I fear she is lost to me indeed,” and tears rose to Ernestine's eyes as she spoke. The girl was gazing intently at her, and as she saw how deeply she felt for Annie, her chest heaved with strong emotion. She pressed her hands tightly together in the effort to control her agitation, and at last exclaimed, the words bursting from her lips with a sob:

"O ma'am ! if you can feel so much for Rosie, will you not show a little pity too for me ?"

"Indeed I will," said Ernestine, rising from her seat and coming to sit down beside her. "I should not have let you go till I had found out if I could help you in any way. Tell me what I can do for you. Your name is Nellie Lewis, is it not ?"

"Ellen Lucas is my real name ;" and then, looking up imploringly, she said, "O ma'am, I want to leave this wicked life. I've always hated it from first to last. I would have left it long ago if there had been any way of doing so except by going to a Penitentiary ; but the girls all advised me not to think of that, in such a way that I was frightened at the thought of it ; and if only you would help me out of it now, ma'am, I could never thank you enough. I think I'd rather die than go back to Mrs. Dorrell's after what happened last night."

"You mean the accident to the two poor little children ?"

"It was not an accident," she answered, with a shudder.

"Not an accident ! What do you mean ?"

"Ma'am, you promised me you would tell no one what I had to say," said Ellen, lifting her dark eyes to her face. "I may quite be sure you will not, may I ?"

"Certainly," said Ernestine ; "I have promised, and that is enough."

"Then it will seem a comfort to tell you what I know, ma'am ; for I can get no rest for thinking of it, and it would be as much as my life is worth, I'm sure, to tell it to any one else, in case it got round to Mrs. Dorrell's ears. These poor children, ma'am," she continued,

lowering her voice, "were not burnt by accident ; they were murdered !"

Ernestine almost shrieked with horror. "Oh ! can this be true ?"

"It is too true, ma'am. The girls whose children they were, had gone off to Aldershot when the long vacation began, and never paid Mrs. Dorrell for keeping them all that time. I don't suppose they cared what became of the poor babies ; for most of them know Mrs. Dorrell always puts away the children that are not paid for,—though I never knew it till last night."

"Puts them away ?" said Ernestine, not understanding.

"Puts them to death, ma'am ! Polly Smith, who is almost an old woman now, and has lived half her life between Mrs. Dorrell's and the jail, said she knew she had got rid of several since she had been there. She had mostly smothered them, and then dropped them into the canal, with a stone round their neck, in the middle of the night. But the body of the last one floated, and she was afraid of being found out, so Polly said she thought she had hit on a clever dodge last night, because she could call on your servants to prove she had been with you at the time of their death. So she laid them down on a straw mattress, on the stone floor of the kitchen, and made a hole in it, and put two or three lighted matches in, and then she went out, and locked the door, and came off to you. She stayed out a whole hour, to make sure they should be dead when she came back ; and so they were, poor dears, sure enough."

Ernestine grew so faint at this horrible account, that it was some minutes before she recovered herself suffi-

ciently to speak. "Did no one try to save them?" she gasped out at last.

"There was no one at home but Polly Smith. Mrs. Dorrell took good care all the rest should be out; and Polly has helped her to put the others in the water before now. But she told me when she heard the screams last night it did make her flesh creep; for burning seemed worse than anything, and she did go to the door and try to open it, but she could not."

"Oh, why did she not go for the police, or get some neighbor to burst the door open?"

"O ma'am!" exclaimed Ellen, almost trembling at the idea, "she would not have dared to do that for fear of Mrs. Dorrell. I would not have any one but you know what I've told you for all the world. It would do no good to tell it; for it could not be proved against her. Polly was the only one who knew anything about it, and she would swear just as Mrs. Dorrell pleased. She said this morning at the inquest it was all an accident, for she knew there were no matches near the children, and they must have got up and taken them to play with. The jury quite believed her."

"Were you called as a witness?"

"No, ma'am; I had been out of the house some hours before it happened, and I knew nothing of it till this morning, when Polly told me, and then I felt that, come what would, I could not stay in that house another day. I thought I would come and ask you to take me away, and that if you would not I would go and lie down in some lonely place and die; for I can't bear it any longer—I can't," and she burst into a passion of tears; "it's like being in hell to be in the midst of all that wickedness, and to feel that I am lost forever!"

"Not forever," said Ernestine compassionately; "the deep mercy of our Saviour never fails. I will help you with all my heart. You do not look to me like one who could ever willingly have entered on such a life."

"Willingly! O ma'am, if you knew all,—how I was driven to it, and how wretched I've been times and times. I would have made away with myself, only I was afraid of God. I did not dare to go before Him so wicked as I have been. I have longed for some way to get out of my sin and misery, and I could find none. I was so lonely, without a friend in the world; and when I saw you at the jail, ma'am, and you let me touch your hand, and seemed so sweet and good, I felt just for a moment as if I were not quite alone on the earth, and that perhaps you'd help me; but I never saw you more till yesterday, and then I seemed more lost than ever; for Mrs. Dorrell threatened me so when you were gone, that if it had not been for this cruel murder, I don't think I should have had courage to come to you."

"You need fear nothing now, my poor child," said Ernestine; "but I hardly know how best to help you; you seem to shrink from going to a Penitentiary?"

"I do indeed, ma'am," said Ellen, with a palpable shiver. "I would rather go there than stay at Mrs. Dorrell's; but oh! if you would help me out of this life in any other way, I should be so thankful. I don't care how hard I work, or what I do, just to get bread to eat. I have been used to service; but I know I must not hope for that now," and she hung her head down, as tears fell from her eyes.

"What sort of service were you in?" said Ernestine.

"I was never but in one situation, ma'am ; and it was such a happy one ! I waited on a lady who was an invalid, and could not leave her sofa ; but she was such a dear, good lady ; it was a pleasure to do anything for her ; and she was so kind to me. My father was a small farmer near where she lived, and he failed, and died of a broken heart when I was about sixteen. Mother had been dead a year, and I was left alone, without a friend or a penny in the world ; and this dear lady took me on trial, and soon taught me all her ways, and I lived three years with her, and was so happy. I used to read to her, and stay with her in the drawing-room most of the day, and she would often say I must never leave her as long as she lived ; and I never would, if it had not been for—" her sobs choked her for a moment.

"And how did you come to leave her ?" said Ernestine gently.

"She had a nephew, young Lord Sedley, heir to a grand castle and estate not far from where his aunt lived, and he used to come and stay with her often. He was such a handsome, dashing gentleman, and had such a winning way with him,—and of course I often saw him ; for I was always with my lady, even when he was there, and he found plenty ways of seeing me alone. He would saunter into the garden with his cigar when my lady sent me to gather flowers, and he would come to the room where I sat almost every evening after she was gone to bed. He was the master and I was the servant, and I could not tell him to go away, as I might with another. I should have told his aunt, I know, but she would hardly have believed anything against him ; and then I loved him—I loved him," and again the pas-

sionate tears forced their way from her eyes. "At last the end of it all was that I saw nothing but misery and shame before me, and I waited till he came next time, in such an agony lest I should be found out, and told him, and he was so vexed and angry. It did seem so hard. I thought my heart would break when I found how he took it all. At last he said I was to tell his aunt I was ill, and wished to go and stay with a friend. I had no friend in all the world, ma'am; but I told the lie to my dear lady; for he taught me to lie; I had never done it before. Well, she was so kind, and let me go, and said I was to come back as soon as ever I could; and then he gave me money to go and take a lodging somewhere; and I came here because I knew he was at college, and I thought I should see him. But he never once came near me; and before my boy was born he had left Greyburgh for good, and never came back. I wrote to tell him of the baby's birth, and he sent me a ten-pound note, with such a cruel letter, asking how I dared write to him, and that I was never to presume to take such a liberty again, and that I was mad to suppose he was going to keep up any acquaintance with such a one as I was. He said he sent me some money now, and there was to be an end to it. When I got that letter I think I must have died, if it had not been for my baby. I lived quietly till the money was all spent, and then I tried to work for my living, but my character was gone, and no one would employ me. I was weak and ill, and half broken hearted, and had no strength to do rough field-work, or anything of that kind. Then I began to sell my clothes to get food for me and my boy, and they were soon all gone. If I had been alone, I think I would have tried

to make up my mind to go to the workhouse then, but they would have separated me from my child, and I could not stand that; and besides, I could only have remained there a short time, and then they'd have passed me on to my own parish; and I never could have borne to go back to my native place as a workhouse pauper, and something worse. Well, ma'am, when both the baby and I were half starved, I thought I would try to see him who had brought me to this misery; so I set off to walk to the beautiful place where he lived. It took me days and days, carrying the child, but at last I got there; and when I came to the gate, the lodge-keeper would not let me in. I told him I wanted to speak to the young lord, and he jeered at me, and said it was just likely he'd speak to such a one as I was; and then, when I still persisted, he said if I chose to wait outside the gate, I could see him when he came home from his ride. So I sat down by the roadside and waited. Oh, Miss Courtenay, I wish I had died then! I wish his horse's hoofs had kicked me to death; it would have been better than to have been trampled on by the man who had ruined me, body and soul. I sat there, on that hot summer day, thirsty and weary, with the sun beating down on my head, and the baby lying asleep on my lap, till I felt ready to faint with fatigue and hunger; and I thought if I could but get sight of his dear face again, it would be like new life. Then there came the clatter of horses swiftly toward me; the sound of gay laughing and talking; and in a moment more a large party swept past me, and cantered up to the gate. They stopped close to the place where I sat, and he was the last, with a beautiful young lady riding close by his side. I never saw her but that once, for a moment, and

yet I remember her as distinctly as if she were standing before me now: her bright laughing face, and her pretty hat and feather, with her fair hair all in confusion below it. I seem still to see the look, half sly, half saucy, that she turned on my lord. Somehow it stirred my blood, and made me forget to be prudent. I felt as if I must show I had a right to him—I, the mother of his child; and I walked straight up to him, put my hand on his horse's mane, and called him by his name. I said I had come to see him, as I had not heard from him, and I wanted help for his child. Oh, ma'am, if you had seen his face when he saw and heard me; it grew just like the face of a devil. He struck me with his riding-switch on the wrist to make me loose my hold, and he spurred his horse, so that the beast reared and threw me back against the bank. The young lady screamed, and I saw him stoop to her so tenderly, and bid her not be afraid; it was only an impudent beggar, he said; and he took her horse by the bridle and led him in at the gate, talking to her all the while, till her face grew bright again and she looked up into his eyes with a smile and a blush. I saw it all, though my heart had stopped beating, and I felt like to die. I leant there against the bank, not knowing where I was, or what I was doing, till suddenly I saw him coming striding down the avenue on foot from the house. I felt nothing but terror then. I thought he was coming to kill me, and I would have run away, but my feet failed under me. He came on and on through the gate and passed me, making a sign to me to follow him; and I dared not disobey, for he looked as if he were almost mad with fury and rage. He struck into a by-path, and, as soon as we were out of sight of the road, he

turned round and took hold of me by the shoulder with such a grip that I screamed with the pain. 'Be still, you devil,' he said, and shook me, and then, when I cowered down, frightened to death, he poured out such a volley of oaths and abuse, that I thought I must be dreaming to think he was the same who once spoke to me all the loving words that worked my destruction. He asked me how I dared to come near him, and swore if ever I tried either to see him, or write to him again, he would have me put in jail for a vagrant and impostor. All I could do was to gasp out that his child was starving, and I held it toward him; but he pushed it back, so as nearly to knock it out of my arms; and he laughed—yes, he laughed,—and asked if I expected him to believe it was his child. He called me the worst name, and said he knew it was all a trick to get money out of him; but I had had too much already, and he would not give me a penny more than enough to take me out of the place. He pointed to the station, which was close at hand, and ordered me to go there at once, and he would send some one to pay my fare and see me off. I was too frightened and broken hearted to resist; so I said never a word, but crept away to the station, and presently the village policeman came after me, and took my ticket, and sent me away in the train, threatening me with all manner of things if ever I came begging about the place again. I suppose my lord told him I was a common tramp. I never contradicted him. I did not care what any one thought; and when I got back here, homeless and penniless, what could I do but go to Mother Dorrell's, to get food for myself and the child? I suppose God wanted to punish me, for He soon took

my baby; it died; and then it did not matter what happened. I was quite ready to be what my lord had called me. What did it signify?"

A look of wild desperation was gradually wakening in Ellen's eyes as she spoke, and she began nervously drawing her cloak around her, as if she were about to rise and go away; but Ernestine took her hand.

"It has been dreadful for you, my poor child, and that man was very cruel; but you see God has not forgotten you. He has sent me to help you, and now I am going to take care of you. You shall never go back to that life of sin and wretchedness any more."

The sweet, kind words fell on the wretched woman's heart like soft summer raindrops on the parched ground. She clasped the soft hand she held in both of hers, and burst into tears.

Ernestine whispered to her to remain quiet for a few minutes, and she would return to her; and then went to confer with Mrs. Berry as to a plan she had already conceived on behalf of this unhappy girl.

She had promised Mrs. Berry that she would give her a home, at least until her health was somewhat restored; and the idea at once suggested itself, that she might take a small house for the nurse somewhere in the suburbs of London, and establish her in it, on condition that she received Ellen Lucas as an inmate, and undertook the care of her; and that in the event of Annie Brook being found, she would afford her an asylum also. There was an additional advantage in the plan, that Ellen would find ample employment in nursing Mrs. Berry, who required constant attendance; and the occupation of soothing the sufferings of another was calculated more than anything to soften and hu-

manize her, after the dreadful demoralization she had undergone.

This plan approved itself to Mrs. Berry most entirely. She was an honest, conscientious woman, and was very unwilling to be dependent on Miss Courtenay, without giving her services in return, which, in her enfeebled state, was not an easy matter; but she felt that, by affording an asylum to those unhappy girls, she would be really of essential use to her, while her own kind-hearted wish to help these, the most wretched and forlorn of human beings, would likewise be gratified.

She therefore eagerly undertook to do all Ernestine wished, and told her, to the lady's great delight, that she could provide a home for Ellen Lucas that very night, as she had a sister living in London who would, she knew, gladly take them both in till she could find a house for herself. It was at once settled therefore that they should go up to town by the next train; and as Ernestine had now no motive for remaining in Greyburgh, beyond receiving Matthew Brook's answer, which could be forwarded to her, she herself followed that same evening. She arrived in London to find her aunt, Lady Beaufort, "in a state of high displeasure" at what she termed her extraordinary proceedings; for which *désagrément*, however, the warmth and tenderness of Hugh Lingard's welcome amply compensated.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LOST FOUND.

ERNESTINE had the comfort of feeling that her journey to Greyburgh, though unavailing so far as Annie was concerned, had not been in vain, since it had resulted in the rescue of Ellen Lucas; yet a strange depression hung about her after her return to London, for which, she felt, her anxiety about the lost girl was not sufficient to account. The deeper revelation of evil which these last events had brought to her filled her with an indescribable terror of this world's wickedness, which had its rise in the strong spiritual instinct, common to all human beings, though in the great majority of them it is stifled and obscured till it becomes almost non-existent—that instinct which gives intuitive knowledge of the great truth, that in the perfection of God alone the immortal soul can find its real joy, its one repose, its ultimate and eternal satisfaction; and forasmuch as union with Him in His infinite holiness is the aim and end of our being, it follows that in proportion as a soul recognizes this its true destiny, the more it will shrink from the antagonistic principle of evil, and cling to such faint reflections of the Infinite Goodness as may be found in the creatures once made in their Creator's image. Faith and Truth and Love were all deepening in Ernestine's soul at this time day by day, for in seeking Christ's lost little one she had found at every step

the sinless Christ Himself; she shrunk with ever-increasing sensitiveness from evil external to herself, and struggled more and more vehemently with that which lurked in her own being, her whole spirit going out in ardent love and longing to the only Holy, whom she recognized as her true and eternal Life, while the human affections which shared in her growing sanctification strove anxiously to rest on the one human being, whom her short-sighted partiality endowed with so bright a ray from the Divine Perfection.

Ernestine believed with all a woman's blind, unreasoning faith, in Hugh Lingard's goodness. She was aware, at the time of her first engagement to him, that such views on religion as he possessed were more negative than positive, but she knew nothing then of the immutable principle which a deeper knowledge of life was rapidly teaching her, that true virtue can have no existence except on a foundation of dogmatic truth. Now, when all things pertaining to the kingdom of God were ever looming larger and more distinct upon her view, she grasped at the hope that Lingard was also awakening to the realities of a more clearly-defined creed, and that the tender reverence he showed to her, the consideration with which he treated all her ideas, was the result of his adoption of her faith, and not of his love to herself; and so it came to pass that the nearer insight into the hidden depths that underlie the surface of society, which had filled her with such horror and dismay, drove her to fling herself, so far as this world was concerned, far more entirely than ever before upon the love of Hugh Lingard, and on the tie which bound her to him.

Thoughts of this description had been stirring in her

mind one morning, as she sat on a low seat at his side, while he showed her some plans for the improvement of the old manor-house he had inherited from his impoverished father, without an acre of land to render the place of any value. When they had fully discussed the plans, and laid them aside, Ernestine leant her head on the arm of his chair, with a wistful sigh.

"Do you know, Hugh, it makes me tremble to think what it would be to me to live in this terrible world, if I had not you. You cannot think how full of dread it has grown for me since I have seen some of its dark realities, or how thankful I am to have you to rest on, safe and sure."

"Dearest," he said, "I can only be rejoiced at anything which binds you more closely to me; but I trust it is not because you think well of me that you can find this comfort in me?"

"But it is because I do think well of you," she answered, clinging to him. "Oh, what would become of me if I did not? What a black, horrible wilderness this world would be to me if I were compelled to think of you as of some—cruel, degraded, selfish, mean! Oh, I could not bear it! I think I could not live; but, thank Heaven, it is not so. You are my own—noble and good and true—whom I may love as such to all eternity."

"Ernestine, don't. I cannot bear it," said Lingard, almost writhing in the soft clasp of her clinging hands. "You do not know what you are saying. To you, I hope, I always shall be true and stainless; but I am not good—not better than others. Don't think it, child."

"And now I love you better than ever after that

speech," said Ernestine, looking up laughingly; "for of all things in the world a vain man is what I most despise; and you are only proving that you are not vain. No it is of no use; you shall not beat me out of my position. I must and will honor and admire as well as love you, even before the church makes me vow to do so." He bent down over her and kissed her hands, without speaking; and with the rapid change of expression so characteristic of her mobile countenance, the smile faded from her face, and her eyes filled with tears, as she said: "I do not know how I could laugh about it, even for a moment, for it is a terrible thing to rest on the goodness of one human being so completely as I do on yours. If anything could ever obscure this faith in you, the whole world would grow dark for me—all earthly hope and joy would pass away forever, and life become only a toilsome passage to the grave."

"Ernestine, these are words which might terrify any man," said Lingard gravely. "I conclude, then, that if you were to find me such a one as those of whom you heard at Greyburgh, it would have this effect upon you?"

"Can you doubt it?" she said, crimsoning all over her fair face. "But don't speak of such dreadful impossibilities. I should like to forget the very existence of such beings. There cannot surely be many like them in the world?"

Lingard made no answer. He sat deep in thought for a few minutes, and then suddenly asked her why so much time was necessary before their marriage could take place.

"Your aunt talks of six weeks, even now, from this time, while it seems to me we have already waited needlessly long."

"But, you see, it is to be at Beaufort Court. My aunt will require a week or two after her arrival there before she can fill the house with guests, and we are still to be three weeks in town."

"It seems to me all very unnecessary," he said impatiently. "Why cannot we just go out to-morrow morning, and be married quietly in the nearest church, without all these senseless preliminaries? You would become quite as securely my wife in that plain black silk, as in all the white satin and lace Lady Beaufort no doubt means to heap upon you."

"That is very true," said Ernestine, laughing; "and there is nothing I should like better than a wedding of that description; but I am afraid you would find Aunt Beaufort rather impracticable on the subject."

"I suppose I should," he answered moodily, and the subject dropped.

About a fortnight after this conversation Ernestine came home one day from driving with her aunt, and found a letter waiting her, in a strange handwriting. She opened it, and straightway uttered such a sudden exclamation that Lady Beaufort declared she had shaken her nerves for the remainder of the day. It was from the matron of one of the London workhouses, stating that a young woman had been brought in the night before by a policeman, who had found her lying near the door in a fainting fit, which appeared to have been caused by want of food and exhaustion. She had gradually revived, and, having taken a little nourishment, had been able to speak; but the doctor, who had seen her that morning, had pronounced her in a dying state, from fatal disease of the lungs and other organs, and said that the utmost care and attention could only

prolong her life a few days. She had stated her name to be Rosie Brown, and when they asked her if she had any friend who ought to be made acquainted with her hopeless condition, she took from within her dress a paper on which Miss Courtenay's name and address were written, and begged them to send for her—in accordance with which request the matron now wrote.

Found once more! dying indeed, but still found, so that a last effort might be made to bring the immortal soul to God, before it passed forever from the world which had worked its cruel woe. Ernestine remembered having given Annie her address when she left her at the Penitentiary, and she augured well of the feeling which had made the poor child wear this scrap of paper next her heart, even in the midst of all her willful wanderings.

Without a moment's delay she sent for a hired conveyance, knowing that Lady Beaufort would not at all approve of her aristocratic carriage being used for the purposes contemplated by her, for it was her full intention, if it could be done without risk, to take Annie at once to Mrs. Berry's, where she could attend to her herself, and where also Thorold could visit her; as Mrs. Berry, firm in her allegiance, had managed to get a house in the district where he was working for the present. Ernestine took her maid with her, in case she might require help, and started at once. After a drive which seemed interminable, through streets and lanes such as she had never even imagined in their squalor and misery, she at length reached a dingy, dismal-looking building, which proved to be the workhouse in question. It struck Ernestine that the jail she had thought so terrible at Greyburgh was quite a cheerful residence

compared to this, and certainly old Bolton contrasted favorably with the surly porter who now opened the door about two inches, and informed her that ladies were not allowed to see the paupers. He was about to close it, when she hurriedly told him that she had come at the matron's request, and showed him the letter, which she had fortunately brought with her. He gruffly told her to wait, and went apparently to inquire the truth of her statement. When at last he came back and let her in, it was with the aggrieved look of a man who is being imposed upon.

Ernestine was shown into the matron's room, where she found that functionary sitting over a fire, in spite of the warm weather, and discussing some tea and buttered toast with remarkable gusto. It was with no good grace that she got up to show Ernestine the way to the sick ward.

"The young woman is dying," she said; "and I shouldn't have troubled for no one to come to see her, if the doctor hadn't said if she went off sudden to-day, and she unbeknown to any one, there might 'ave to be a 'quest; and these coroners and magistrates have got that bumptious and interfering with the way we does for the paupers here, that we're obliged to make as much of these tramps as if they were worth their keep, which they ain't. Here's the ward, ma'am, and the nurse will show you the bed;" and pushing open the door of a narrow, dark, ill-ventilated room, she went back in all haste to her tea. ●

Ernestine went in, and stood for a moment, almost overcome with the close, disagreeable air of the ward. It was filled with beds on either side, and all were occupied by suffering women. Nearly every fatal dis-

ease was represented there, for the poor creatures had not come to this, the last home of despair, till the long lingering hopes which life could give in any shape had wholly died away. Cancer, dropsy, consumption, and many another malady were there, and, worse than all, insanity and idiocy had their place beside those whose physical sufferings were greatly aggravated by their presence. Stretched on small hard beds, under scanty covering, lay those helpless sufferers, and over all presided one wretched old woman, herself a pauper, dignified with the name of a nurse, and receiving, for what may simply be termed the non-discharge of her duties, a payment sufficient to enable her to procure surreptitiously the bottle of gin, which she thrust under the nearest bed when Ernestine came in, her flushed face and indistinct speech, however, implying that she had already been regaling to a considerable extent. She was bent nearly double with rheumatism, and walked with a stick, of which her unfortunate patients seemed to stand in great awe. Her expression was that of habitual ill temper, aggravated, no doubt, by the pain and weakness resulting from her malady, and which rendered her, independently of everything else, wholly unfit for her post.

"Now, then," she exclaimed, in a harsh grating voice, knocking with her stick furiously on the floor, as the poor patients turned round to look at Ernestine, "now, then, what are you a-staring and a-gaping for like that? what business is it of yours who comes here: lie down, every one of you, or I'll find a way to make you. What was you wanting, ma'am?" she added, to Ernestine, with an attempt at civility, inspired by the hope that sundry shillings might be forthcoming from the pocket of so well-dressed a lady.

"I have come to see Rosie Brown,—where is she?"

"Rosie Brown: don't know such a name; there's none such here."

"Yes there is," said a miserable-looking woman, who, unable to lie down from her difficulty of breathing, and having nothing to support her back, was trying to rest her head against the wall; "she was brought in last night, but you didn't notice her, nurse, you was so drowsy-like," she added tremulously, afraid of the nurse's wrath, who had simply been dead drunk. "I don't think you've seen her this morning, but I heard her tell her name. That's her over there, ma'am," she added, pointing to a distant bed.

"See if I don't stop your tea for this, you—." We forbear to give the horrible oath with which the nurse closed her speech; and as the poor dying woman heard that her tea, her one little comfort, was to be taken away, tears rolled silently over her faded cheeks. She watched Ernestine, however, who with gentle step, that she might not disturb the sufferers, was making her way to the bed she had indicated; and the poor creature murmured to herself, "I am glad I told her, for all I've lost my tea; for she'll bring a bit of comfort to that poor wench dying there, and she's younger nor I, and less used to rough it."

Annie was lying with her head turned from the direction in which Ernestine was coming, and she did not hear or see her, so that she was able to stand and look at her for a few moments without being observed. It was Annie indeed, but changed to a degree that Ernestine could hardly have believed possible, in the course of the few weeks since she had escaped from the Penitentiary. She was wasted almost to a skeleton; her

wan face, with its bloodless lips and sharpened features, speaking of terrible suffering from want and destitution. The only traces of her former beauty were the blue eyes, looking preternaturally large from her excessive thinness, and the bright hair, far too profuse to be confined in the workhouse cap, flowing all in confusion over the hard pillow. She lay in a heap on the bed, the sharp outline of her limbs showing distinctly under the scanty covering, as if she had just been flung there by some rude hand, and was too exhausted to move from the position in which she had been placed. Her breathing was hurried and oppressed, and the burning spot on the cheek showed that she was parched with fever. "Oh," thought Ernestine, "if her destroyer could but see the mournful wreck he has made!" Hearing a step, but not looking round, Annie feebly murmured, "Some drink, please, some drink, for the love of Heaven!"

"What can I give her to drink?" said Ernestine, turning round to the nurse, who had followed her.

"Hang me if I know," said the woman; "I've got nothing for her, not so much as for myself—worse luck. Here, give her this fine cold water," she added, snatching up a mug of water that stood by the bedside of another patient, who looked wistfully after it.

"I will bring it to you again," said Ernestine to the sufferer, "if you will kindly let me have just a little for this poor girl;" and the patient, brightening into a smile, begged her to take it. She went back to Annie's bedside. As she came close to her the girl looked up, and, seeing who it was, uttered a stifled cry, and buried her face on the pillow. It was evident that the recollection of her ingratitude in leaving the Home where

the lady had placed her made her afraid to meet her again. Ernestine stooped down and kissed her forehead. "Annie, dear Annie," she said, "I am thankful to have found you again. I am so sorry for all you seem to have suffered."

Then Annie lifted up her head, and looked with an intense gaze into Ernestine's face. As she met the pitying eyes looking down so lovingly upon her, she suddenly flung her wasted arms round Ernestine, and, laying her head on her breast, exclaimed, "Oh, my dear lady, you are like an angel from heaven to me!" Then, with something of her old impulsiveness, even in the midst of her great weakness, she started from Ernestine's gentle hold, and said, "Miss Courtenay, I have not done wrong since I saw you last,—indeed, indeed I have not. I could not stay at the Penitentiary, but I felt that I'd starve rather than do wrong, and I have starved, but I've not sinned. Oh, I hope you'll believe me!"

"I do believe you, Annie, my child: don't doubt it; and I am thankful for it. It was better to suffer, as I can see you have done, than to sin."

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Annie wearily; "it was the one thought of you and all you told me, kept me from it, but it has been an awful time. I tried to work and get an honest living when I came from the Penitentiary, but the whole world was turned against me: they could all see what I was, and no one would employ me; so I sold my clothes, bit by bit, for food, till I had nothing left but my gown, and I slept under the arches of the bridge at night, but the water looked so black and cold I could not drown myself, as Lois did. I got ill, and my cough was dreadful, and at last I fell down on the pavement, and I thought I was dying, and

so I am, I suppose, and then there's hell—" Her voice, which had been growing feebler as she spoke, died away, and she sank back on the bed half fainting. Ernestine bathed her face and hands with water, and slowly the dim blue eyes opened again, and a smile flickered over the wan face, but she did not speak, and lay seemingly quite content to hold Ernestine's hand and look at her.

"Has the doctor seen her to-day?" asked Ernestine.

"That he han't," said the nurse; "where's he to get the time to see folk every half hour?"

"He saw her last night when she was brought in," said an old woman in the next bed, "and he said she was a dying, and it was no use doing anything."

"And the chaplain, has he been to visit her yet, or will he come to-day?"

"Bless you, he'll see her in his regular rounds; and her turn ain't like to come for a week or two yet."

Ernestine looked at Annie's deathlike face, and thought of the answer made a few years ago by a bishop's chaplain to a prison official, who intimated to him that a condemned criminal awaiting his execution was desirous of receiving the right of confirmation: "His Lordship would make his biennial confirmation tour in the course of a year and a half, and would be happy then to receive any candidates who might be presented to him."

"She is very low and faint," said Ernestine, feeling the poor girl's scarcely perceptible pulse. "What nourishment has she had?"

"The doctor gave her some beef-tea hisself last night," said the old woman in the next bed; "and she han't had nothing since."

"She ought to have something immediately," ex-

claimed Ernestine, much shocked at the neglect, which in this case was likely to be fatal.

"Oh, it's all very fine to say ought this and ought that," said the nurse; "but she can't have anything if there is nothing to have. We keeps regular hours here, and it ain't dinner-time now, nor yet supper-time. She'll have her rations with the rest when the proper hour comes."

To leave Annie in this place was certainly not to be thought of, and Ernestine determined to lose no time in taking her away.

"I shall take this patient home," she said to the nurse. "Do you know if there is anything to prevent my doing so?"

"Nothing at all as I knows on. A good riddance, I should say. Leastways, not unless the doctor were to say it would kill her to move her."

"Can I hear what he says now, then?" said Ernestine. "Is he in the house?"

"Sure to be at this hour; for it's his time for going through the men's ward."

"Would you be so kind as to go and ask him, then?" said Ernestine, putting some money into the nurse's hand; "and if he does not object to my removing her, will you tell the matron I shall do so at once?"

The old woman hobbled off willingly enough after the receipt of such a gratuity; and Ernestine went to tell her maid, who was waiting at the door, to go to the nearest shop, and buy some blankets to wrap round the dying girl. As she came back through the room, the poor woman who had pointed out Annie's bed to her, said, in a sad voice:

"Be you a-going to take her away, ma'am? It's a

blessed thing for her, poor wench ; but I wish I was a-going too."

"And so do I, and so do I," was echoed from all the beds near her.

"I am sure I wish I could take you all away," said Ernestine, looking sorrowfully round on the forlorn faces which met her on every side. "I wish indeed I could help you in any way; but I do not know how. I fear it is against the rules to give money."

"Ah, that it is," said the woman ; "and it would be no use, for they never let us keep it. That nurse would find it out, I do believe, if we hid it in our coffins."

"I am very sorry for you all," said Ernestine ; "and I will try if I can get leave to come and visit you, and bring you some little comforts. I will do all I can."

"God bless you," resounded on all sides; and the poor woman said gratefully, "You have done something for us already, ma'am, for you have given us kind words; and that's what we don't get many days in the year." She heard the nurse's step, and shrunk back.

"The doctor says you may take her and welcome," said the old woman as she came in. "She's got to die anyhow, he says, and it won't make a bit of difference what you do with her. And the matron, she says you can please yourself; but she's very particular engaged just now, and can't be disturbed. She's engaged a-having of her tea," continued the nurse savagely, "a-frying her bacon, and a-bolting on it like anything. It is a shame, it is, she as has nothing to do but to sit with her hands across like a fine lady, feeding on the best; and me, that am toiling and moiling among them worrying sick folk all the day long, getting nothing much better nor the pauper's rations;" and so she went grum-

bling on, till Ernestine stopped her to ask if she could get one of the men to carry poor Annie down stairs to the carriage. This she did for a further "consideration," and the blankets having been brought, Annie was borne through the midst of her fellow sufferers, who looked wistfully after her, and placed in the carriage, which was ordered to drive at once to Mrs. Berry's.

Annie lay half insensible in Ernestine's arms the whole way; but she opened her eyes and smiled faintly at the cry of passionate delight with which Ellen Lucas recognized her, as she was carried into the house.

"Oh, I am so glad Annie's found, and safe with me in this happy home. You will let me nurse her, Miss Courtenay, won't you?"

"Gladly," said Ernestine, smiling. "You and Mrs. Berry together will, I know, take good care of her."

"That we will, poor lamb," said Mrs. Berry, looking compassionately on the wasted form that lay in the coachman's arms, with the face of marble whiteness, and the long bright hair streaming over his rough coat-sleeve. And they certainly did their best for her. That evening, placed in a clean comfortable bed, after having a little soup and wine, Annie fell into so quiet a slumber that Ernestine was able to leave her without anxiety.

Next day, when the physician, whom Ernestine sent for, saw her, he said, that although the workhouse doctor had been quite right in saying the case was entirely hopeless, and the end very near, yet he thought the great care and good nursing she was likely to have might prolong her life two or three weeks at least.

And so it proved. The frequent nourishment she took, and the perfect rest and quiet she enjoyed,

enabled her to rally considerably, and a last little wave of life seemed to bear her up once more on the mortal shore, from which she was so soon to pass away and be no more seen.

Ernestine was very thankful for this respite. Poor Annie's earthly life had been so mercilessly blighted, that it would indeed have been a mistaken compassion to have wished it ultimately prolonged; but she did desire earnestly that time might be given her to make her peace with God, in whom alone could be her true and eternal rest. This anxiety Thorold shared to the full; and he undertook, with his usual quiet energy, to do all he could for the dying girl. Ernestine wrote to Annie's father, to tell him of her hopeless state; and also, that it had been induced entirely by the sufferings she had endured, in consequence of her determination to keep from evil. In his reply he thanked Miss Courtenay heartily for all her kindness, and said the only comfort he could know about his wretched child, was the fact of her being saved from dying in the workhouse. He sent her his love and free forgiveness; but he said he could not bring himself to see her, and he felt sure it was happiest for them both not to meet; and as Annie shared in this opinion, Ernestine made no opposition to his decision.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LAST STRUGGLE.

AND now commenced within that narrow room another phase of the awful and mysterious struggle, which, from the highest heaven, when angels fell from their first estate, in ages inconceivably remote, down to the feeblest child that this day wakes to personal consciousness, has still rent the universe with dreadful combat, dying into stillness by every open grave, but reproduced again at every human birth; and never ceasing, where living breath is drawn, to make earth ghastly with the "confused noise of battle, and garments rolled in blood."

"There was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon fought, and his angels." What affinity could there be between the stupendous scene of mystery and terror opened to us in these words, and the death-bed of that lost degraded child, seeming in her dishonor and weakness the most despicable and insignificant of God's creatures? Yet were they but links of the one great chain, whose beginning and end are alike hid in the Omniscient hand—the chain forged by the electric shock of the antagonistic principles of good and evil. What though in the one case it might be the destinies of the universe to all eternity which were involved, and in the other but one immortal soul which trembled in the balance

of everlasting life or death?—who shall say which seemed most momentous in the impartial judgments of Perfection ; for has not the Cross on Calvary taught us that the fate of a single soul could have moved the Throne of God Himself to the very center, since He who became incarnate to save the human race would have done no less had but one out of all their millions stood in risk of perishing !

The struggle in this instance was very fierce. The course it took in the deathless soul of this young girl opened up strange vistas as to the far-spreading and indestructible consequences of one evil act, such as that of the man who had lured her to her ruin ; and showed how, in the ages to come, it might live to meet him in such forms of hideousness as would appall him in his hour of final judgment.

Annie Brook's mental state, when told by Thorold that her life's probation was wearing to its close, was simply one of entire despair ; but it was a condition which resulted not from her own sin, but from that of her betrayer. For her own guilt, dark and dreadful as it was, she knew that sacred blood had been shed, from a Heart so spotlessly pure that it had power to wash away even the black stain that defiled her soul ; but she felt that if he, who with words of sweetest promise had won her innocent love, had but left her as he found her, a safe and happy child in her father's home, she might even now have been traversing life with honor and affection round her, and blessed years in store, which the holy ties of wife and mother would fill with tranquil joy. She knew that he had deceived her with the cruellest deceit one human being can practice on another, —he, the experienced man of the world, she, the igno-

rant girl of sixteen. She knew that he had demanded, and by false words obtained, the sacrifice of her whole being for time and for eternity, in order to give himself a passing pleasure. And when he desired to rid himself of a burden which had lost its charm, he had consigned her to depths of guilt and degradation unknown to her before even by name; while he himself, whose words had ever been law to her, had told her that, because of what he had made her, no other resource but that remained to her in all the earth—except a grave. He had told her this; he had lashed her with words which stung like scourges of fire, till he had driven her on to set the seal on her infamy, and then turned away to enter on his fair honorable life again—his life of pleasure, sensual and intellectual, of refinement, of high ambition, of glowing hopes and bright reality;—and the thought of these things crushed hope and trust utterly out of her soul, and cursed her with the fatal conviction that one doomed to such a fate could never have had a share in the love of God.

“If God loves sinners, I am too great a sinner for Him to love,” she said; “if He had loved me He would have killed me when I stepped out of father’s house to go to my ruin. No; it seems as if the one He loves is the man who has been my curse; for I saw him, Mr. Thorold, I saw him, a few nights ago, driving to the theater in a carriage, with some of his fine friends, looking so well and so handsome, laughing and talking, with livery-servants waiting on him, and the people making way to let him into the bright beautiful place, with its lights and its music. Yes, and he flung money to a beggar standing near; and I, what do you think I was doing? crouching on the wet pavement, soaked

through and through, for it was pouring of rain, faint and like to die; for not a bit had I had to eat that day, and with no other place to sleep that night but the stones at my feet; and because I leant forward to look at the face I had loved too well, a policeman gave me a push that sent me reeling against a door-step, and then called me a bad name, and said none of my sort should stand among respectable folk; so I was frightened, and I turned into a dark court, where nobody would pass, and lay down on the stones for the night; and was I to lie there thinking God loved me and not rather him, who sat in the bright warm theater listening to the music and taking his pleasure?"

It was not easy to convince an unreasoning and un-intellectual mind like Annie's, that in the very fact of the success of the wicked, and the sufferings their sin inflicts often alike on the innocent and guilty, lies the strongest natural argument for the immortality of the soul and the future retribution of God, "the righteous Judge, strong and patient." In all ages, in all places, the human instinct has responded to this truth. David of old, in his grief and dismay at sight of the ungodly in such prosperity, exclaimed: "Then thought I to understand this, but it was too hard for me, until I went into the sanctuary of God, then understood I the end of these men. Oh how suddenly do they consume away, perish, and come to a fearful end! Yea; even like as a dream when one awaketh." And from his day to the present, the consideration of this great mystery of evil has led every honest mind to see, in the existence of these deep and hidden things of God, the certain promise that His immutable justice shall yet shine forth as the sun of all eternity in the death-day of the world; when

the clamorous instinct of right and wrong, that cries aloud in every living soul, shall find perfect satisfaction in His most pure judgment, and His final adjustment of the moral creation.*

Strongly as those arguments commend themselves to those whose reasoning powers have been cultivated, Thorold knew they would not be understood by Annie Brook; but for her, as for all, there was one most potent and infallible proof, which lay open and glorious in its truth as the clear light of day in the face of heaven. In the charity that clothed the Immaculate God with the humility of the Incarnation, and won from Him voluntary endurance of death and sufferings, whose bitterness exceeded the world's accumulated woe, there is a revelation of the Divine love which swallows up in its fullness and completeness all seeming mysteries of evil, and stamps with the seal of eternal tenderness, and the promise of ultimate good, every incident in the life of individual souls, as in the history of the world at large. Whatever may be the darkness, and confusion, and injustice that seems to plunge the earth in chaos, none who have realized, so far as human comprehension may, the meaning of the awful "*It is finished*," which has echoed down the vanished ages to thrill in the heart of every one of us, can doubt that at the last, love, immaculate, illimitable, all-enduring, will be found the one governing principle that has ruled the world, and shall be the deathless life of man's eternity.

To awaken Annie Brook therefore to a perception of

* An able exposition of this argument will be found in a work entitled *Some Words for God*, under the heading IMMORTALITY (published by Messrs. Rivington, London).

the love manifest on the Cross was the work to which Thorold now set himself with his whole might. How difficult a task it was, those only can know who have attempted to teach this simplest yet sublimest truth to an uneducated mind. Perhaps not one in a thousand of the lower orders does in reality discern the motive power which made the Son of God obedient unto death; they repeat by rote words which imply it, and they have a vague knowledge of the actual event of the crucifixion; but that they are to see in it not only an evidence of love, but of a love which is personal to themselves, and of the deepest moment to them, is what most of them go from the cradle to the grave without ever realizing. Their teachers imagine that the words "He died for me," repeated by every Sunday-school child, prove their acquaintance with the glorious truth it involves, but there is in reality no idea connected with the sentence in their minds. The fact is that the religious teaching of the lower class is superficial and hollow to the last degree, and so it will continue to be, till the whole of their instruction is brought to bear on their realization of these two great truths—the Divinity of our Lord, and His personal and living interest in themselves.

Annie Brook had received what would be considered a good religious education for a girl of her rank. She knew most of the facts contained in the Pentateuch, and could repeat the names of the Patriarchs, and of some of the Kings of Israel and Judah; and she knew also of the birth of One whom angels worshiped, and Herod sought to slay, and who at length was killed by wicked men, and yet arose the third day, and went up to heaven; but to her it was all just a "Bible story," which had no more reality for her than the "pretty tales," as

she expressed it, which her grandmother used to tell her by the winter hearth.

When at length Thorold brought her to realize the true meaning of the words she had so often repeated, "He died for me," it broke her down completely; the bold unbelief, the rebellious complaint, the angry cry of injustice, were stilled forever, and replaced by the one weary passionate longing to find a shelter for evermore in the Divine compassion of that love, from which she feared she was too fatally shut out. Thorold taught her to trace the evidences of it even in her own past life. The care of her earthly father, type of the Heavenly, which would have shielded her from all evil had she not abandoned it;—the very desertion of her destroyer, which else had let her sin remain too dear to be relinquished;—the remembrance of her by Lois in her last dark hour;—the pity which had tracked her steps from the first day that Ernestine received her mission from the dead;—the providence which had discovered her to her true friend in her last extremity: all these tokens from God, shining like rays of light in the hideous darkness of her sinful past, now but woke in her a deeper pining for Him who can alone be perfect satisfaction to the undying soul; and she implored of Thorold to teach her, the guilty wanderer, how she might seek the crucified Lord, and so feel after Him and find Him, that even she, like happy Magdalene, might yet rest her weary head beneath His blessed feet.

One less experienced than Thorold might have thought the work was done when so much was gained, but he too surely presaged the next difficulty which would assail this victim of a fellow-creature. He told her she must forgive ere she could ask to be forgiven, and with a cry of

passionate indignation she exclaimed it was impossible ! Thorold must know it was impossible for her to forgive the merciless betrayer who had made such havoc of her life and soul ; he was cruel to ask her ; and she writhed on her bed, and clinched her wasted hands convulsively, as if the very remembrance of this man ate into her heart like fire. It has been well said that the deepest hate is that which springs from a dead affection ; it was the bitterness of her outraged love which brought this frenzy on Annie Brook's feeble frame, and made her blue eyes, dim already with the shades of death, gleam with the impotent fury of some wild beast at bay.

Thorold waited till the paroxysm was spent, and then he began, in a low, sad voice, to speak of the inconceivable sufferings of the Passion, in all its awful details of insult, blasphemy, and torture. He spoke of the Perfect Innocence thus punished, the Perfect Love thus cruelly rewarded and betrayed, of the awful agonies, mocked by those for whom they were endured ; and as he went on with this history, which has broken harder hearts than Annie's, the angry fire died out of her eyes, her lip quivered with strong feeling ; and when at last he reminded her how, in return for all this brutal cruelty, this wanton pain and humiliation, the Divine Sufferer lifted up His dying voice and uttered that holiest prayer, with which He still pleads at God's right hand for the pardon of every living soul that, sinning, crucifies Him afresh, and puts Him to open shame, "*Father, forgive them,*"—she suddenly hid her face in her hands, while tears burst through the thin white fingers, and exclaimed :

"Oh, wicked, wretched that I am, what are all my sufferings, my injuries, to His ? And I say I will not forgive, while He forgave the cruel men that mocked

and tortured Him ! Blessed Jesus, I will, I do forgive him ! Oh, pity and pardon us both !”

Again, it might have been thought that from this point all would have been easy and peaceful in the progress of this departing soul ; but there was yet another struggle almost inevitably before her, which Thorold well knew would prove harder than any other. The keen sense of the love and goodness of her Lord, which seemed at last to take possession of Annie’s whole being, brought with it such an overwhelming conviction of her own sin, that a time came when she utterly despaired of any possible pardon for herself. That, after all the blessed Saviour had endured and done for her, she should have turned away from Him to give herself to the sins which He abhorred, seemed to the heart-broken girl to place her beyond the pale of possible forgiveness. She made a full confession of all her guilt to Thorold. She prayed constantly that she might be allowed once again to see the man who had been her enemy, that she might forgive him in words as well as in heart ; but still she could not lift her weeping eyes to heaven, and see aught but justice in the dreadful doom which she anticipated. She refused the Last Sacrament, which Thorold would not now have withheld from her, because she thought that to receive it would but increase her condemnation ; and so she passed through some days and nights in an agony such as no earthly trial or sorrow could ever bring on a living soul. It was plain that, if it continued, it would soon consume the little life still left to her, and both Thorold and Ernestine were greatly concerned about her.

Ernestine spent every moment with her which she could spare from Lingard ; but he seemed now as if he could not endure her to be absent from his sight ; and the

wistful tenderness with which his eyes followed when she left the room, often filled her with a strange sadness, which haunted her even at the death-bed of the dying girl. One evening there was a large dinner-party at Lady Beaufort's, and Lingard had come early that he might have a few minutes with Ernestine before the guests arrived. They were alone in the drawing-room; she was examining some lovely flowers in a vase near her, and he was watching the unconscious grace of her movements, and thinking that she was the very type of all that was gentle and pure and womanly, with her sweet thoughtful face, and soft brown hair, and the flowing white draperies that seemed to create a light around her, when a servant came in with a note for her. It was written in haste by Mrs. Berry, to say that Annie had suddenly become very much worse; that, indeed, in the expressive phraseology of the nurse, she was "taken for death." The doctor had been sent for, and pronounced it impossible she could live through the night, and her exhaustion and breathlessness were so great that Mrs. Berry almost feared she would not last till Ernestine could reach her. The nurse had sent for Thorold, but he was out, and she had desired that he might be told of the girl's dying state immediately on his return. Finally, Mrs. Berry entreated Ernestine not to delay an instant in coming, for Annie was waiting her arrival with all the feverish anxiety of one whose moments were numbered. Ernestine put the note into Lingard's hand.

"I must go," she exclaimed; "I will not wait, even to change my dress. You will explain my absence to my aunt, and make peace for me, will you not, dearest Hugh?"

She had already rung the bell and ordered a cab, and desired that her maid should be sent with a shawl.

"Must you go, darling?" said Lingard, holding both her hands fast.

She looked up to him in surprise.

"You see nurse says she is dying, and fears I can scarce be in time. I must not delay a moment."

Still he would not loose his hold.

"She may be dead before you get there," he said, "then your drive at this untoward hour will be useless."

"Oh, I hope not," exclaimed Ernestine, tears starting to her eyes. "I promised poor Annie to be with her at the last; you know she has not a friend in the world but me. Don't hold me, dearest Hugh; there is Benson at the door with my shawl, and I grudge every moment."

Still he held her.

"I never was so unwilling to part with you in my life, Ernestine."

"But why, dearest?" she said, looking at him anxiously. "I shall only be a few hours away from you, and soon we shall be always together, Hugh."

"Heaven grant it," he said, and for a moment clasped her passionately in his arms, then he let her go, and she hurried to the door. Her maid was standing on the stair, ready to go with her, and with a thick shawl on her arm. Lingard took it from her, and wrapped it round Ernestine with the utmost care. Then he went down with her, and helped her into the carriage, holding her hand fast as he did so, and whispering, "Come back soon, my darling, or I shall come and fetch you."

She turned round her face and smiled at him,—a sweet, bright smile, which was never again to pass from his memory. Lingard returned to the house, with its lights and its flowers, its luxury and its aristocratic guests, while Ernestine, after a long drive through the dark streets, entered the little humble room where the fallen girl was dying in her shame,—a common sight enough in this land of Christian faith and vaunted civilization, yet one—how awful and mysterious!—a deathless soul about to go forth into the dread unknown, with all the stains and wounds of its mortal life upon it, and with eternity rising up before it, dark in despair, because of the sin wherewith one human being had quenched the light of heaven on its path.

As Ernestine entered the room she stopped, almost startled at Annie's wonderful beauty, which at that moment far exceeded even the loveliness she must have possessed when her portrait was taken. It is often thus in the last hours of human existence. The poor people call it the "lightening before death;" and those who have once seen the peculiar brilliancy of the eyes, and the intensely spiritualized expression of the countenance, during that last and brightest flash of life, can never forget it. Annie's breathing was so short and difficult that she could not lie down, and she was propped up in bed, her head supported by several cushions, that she might have as much air as possible. The delicate white of her complexion was relieved by the crimson tinge of fever in her cheeks; her blue eyes, wide open, and shining with unnatural light, flashed from side to side in unceasing restlessness; her wealth of fair hair lay scattered on the pillow round her, and as she gasped, with the heaving of her chest painfully evident, she clutched

the bedclothes convulsively, or pushed back the heavy curls from her face, and glanced round constantly with an eager famishing look, as if she were hungering for some new source of life. As her bright restless eyes fell on Ernestine, she held out her arms passionately, and exclaimed, in a voice pitched high with feverish excitement and exhaustion :

“Oh, Miss Courtenay, come to me, come and help me! What shall I do? Oh what shall I do? I am dying. I am going to see the face of Christ, and how shall I bear it? My sin, my sin; it has crucified Him again and again—the Scripture says it; crucified Him afresh, after the blood He shed, after all He suffered to save me—yes, me! I turned my back on Him, and would have none of Him; I wanted to do the things He hated. He offered me life, and I chose death; He offered me heaven, and I chose hell. Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do?” and she clasped Ernestine’s hands in her convulsive agony, and gazed into her eyes as if she would have wrung some hope from her answer; then, before Ernestine could speak, she had flung herself back again, and was staring upward, almost with a prophetic look.

“The face of Christ, shining as the sun in its strength; Christ, who never sinned, the Judge of all the earth. And I to stand before Him with all my wickedness black upon me! Mercy, mercy; but there is no time! the minutes are flying; I am growing faint; death is cold at my heart. Oh that I could live again! Oh, Lord, that I could live again. I can’t, I can’t! My soul is lost; yes, my wretched soul is lost!” and, breathless, she sank back again. How impotent all human agency was in that hour! Ernestine, trembling from

head to foot, would have given worlds to have helped her; but how? She felt that it was in truth a soul alone with its God, struggling under an awful revelation of His purity and its own iniquity, and that she at least was powerless in such a conflict.

"Is there no chance of Mr. Thorold's coming?" she said, turning anxiously to Mrs. Berry, who was standing near, with tears streaming down her cheeks.

"He's sure to come, my dear lady, the moment he goes home and gets the message; but he's out among the sick and poor somewhere, and no one can tell where to find him, or when he will be back."

"Well, you must not stay here, dear nurse, at all events," said Ernestine, who saw that the good woman was feeling faint and ill. "I shall not leave Annie now, and you must go and lie down. I will call you if I want you."

"I'll go to poor Ellen, then, for she is wonderful timid at the thought of death in the house. She says she's been such a sinner, it scares her; and she can't bring herself to come near the room, for all she's so fond of Annie."

"Yes, go and make her take care of you;" but as she went to the door to close it after Mrs. Berry, Annie thought she was going away, and shrieked out:

"Miss Courtenay, are you going to leave me to die alone, and go out before God with all my sins upon my head? Oh, why won't you help me? Don't you see I am dying? and every wicked thing I've ever done is written on the wall there in letters all of fire; and I'm obliged to see it; I'm obliged to read it. I tell you it's dreadful. And then, there's the Lord Christ dying on His cross, and me flaunting past Him, laughing and mock-

ing. What did I care? I took my pleasure, and let Him suffer in vain for me. Oh, Miss Courtenay, you have done your best for me; but I'm lost, I'm lost!" Only exhaustion made her pause for a moment, but the restless glancing of her eyes never ceased for an instant, or the convulsive clinching of her hands. She was beginning to cry out again with her despairing words, but Ernestine forcibly took the trembling hands in hers, and compelled her to turn her glance on her.

"Annie, listen to me," she said: "I have one word to say, which you must hear. Listen to me quietly, now, for a moment." Annie's eyes rested on hers, and she saw that, for the time at least, she was giving her full attention, and slowly and solemnly Ernestine said: "The Lord Jesus Christ declared, 'I am come into the world to seek and to save that which was lost.' Do you hear me, Annie? He came to save that which was **LOST**."

"Lost!" repeated Annie slowly. "Lost! and who so lost as I am?" She remained silent a moment; then over the bright flashing eyes there gathered a mist of tears.

"Oh, is it possible, that me, even me! so lost, He would seek and save?" She drew her hands out of Ernestine's grasp, and folded them together as she had been taught to do when a little child she repeated her evening prayers, and in a trembling voice she said:

"Lord Jesus, I am lost indeed! Oh, seek and save me, even me, Lord Jesus!" Then she remained perfectly still, her eyes closed, and tears slowly coursing down her cheeks, now grown deadly pale. Ernestine remained kneeling at her side in perfect silence. At last Annie whispered softly:

"Do you think the Lord Jesus would like to save me?"

"I am sure He would, my child."

"But so bad as I have been?"

"His love is greater even than your sin, Annie."

Then there was silence again for a long time. The terrible restlessness was gone. The feverish flush had died away. The calm which often precedes death had set in; and, but for her labored breathing, it would have seemed as if the struggle were already over, so like a marble statue did she seem, with her closed eyes and her unearthly whiteness. Once only she spoke during this interval.

"Do you think Mr. Thorold will come and give me the Sacrament now?"

"I hope so, dear Annie; we have sent for him; he was out, but he will come the moment he gets the message."

"Too late!" she said, with a quiet movement of the head. "He will be too late. But it is only just I should not have it now; I refused it so often."

Then she relapsed into silence. So passed some hours. Sometimes Ernestine thought she slept; at other times her lips moved as if in prayer; but her breathing was growing perceptibly fainter, and it was plain that death was very near. Ernestine knelt, with her back to the door, looking sorrowfully on the white, sad face, and feeling as if she ought to be speaking some words of comfort to her; while at the same time she dared not break in upon a silence in which the departing soul might be listening to the very voice of God. Suddenly she saw Annie start as if she had received an electric shock. Her eyes opened wide, clear and bright

as in her fairest days, and fixed themselves intently on the door, which had opened a moment previously, though Ernestine had been too much absorbed to hear it. The powers of the girl's failing life seemed to rush over her sinking frame once more. She gazed toward that spot with a smile of ecstasy, and stretching out her arms, exclaimed :

"You are come ! Oh, God be praised, who has heard my prayer. You are come, that I may tell you I forgive you with all my heart, with all my soul, as I pray the dear Lord may forgive me too. Come to me ; come to me quick. I have but a moment, and I want to take back the bitter words I have said against you ; let us part in peace, though you wronged me so cruelly, who loved you so well."

Ernestine was utterly astonished at this sudden outburst, and at the strange words Annie uttered, and for a moment she almost thought her delirious ; but it was evident from her look that she was indeed addressing some one actually present, and turning quickly round to see who it was, she gave a suppressed shriek, while her heart seemed to stop beating, and she felt as if turned to stone. It was Hugh Lingard who was standing there in the doorway, with a look of horror and dismay on his face such as no words could paint, while his eyes were fixed on the dying girl with unmistakable recognition ; his arms fell slowly to his sides, and the one word, " Rosie !" escaped involuntarily from his lips. In a moment Ernestine saw it all. The truth flashed upon her soul in all its details, with that irresistible conviction which seems almost like an inspiration from heaven. She knew in that moment, with a terrible knowledge which could never pass away from her, that

the destroyer of this child, whom God had sent her to seek throughout the world, was that very man who was dearer to her than life itself, and in whom her whole earthly happiness was bound up only too fatally. It was like the shock of an earthquake to her thus to learn that the truth and goodness, in which she had believed so fondly as being his special characteristic, had in fact never existed. Kneeling as she was, she had to catch hold of the bed to keep herself from falling, for there was a mist before her eyes, and a roaring as of thunder in her ears; but through it all, she caught the tones of Annie's voice, fainter far than before.

"Oh, why will you not come to me? I am going fast. Why do you look at me so? Are you sorry I am dying? It is best. I could not live any more in this world. But come quick. I want to ask God to forgive you. I want to part friends. My breath is failing. Come."

Her faltering words died away. Her breathing came in long gasps, and Ernestine, forcing herself to look up, saw that an awful change was passing over her features. There was no time to be lost. No earthly thoughts or human feelings must stay the work of charity in that supreme moment. She rose up and went toward Lingard, who had staggered against the wall and covered his face with his hands.

"Is this true?" she said, in her low, sweet voice, which trembled as she spoke. "Is it indeed you who have need to ask her forgiveness?"

He let his hands fall and turned toward her.

"It is true, Ernestine. God, in whom you believe, has brought this judgment on me."

"Then come as she wishes—come quickly—she is expiring."

He looked toward Annie, and saw that it was so indeed. Her head had fallen back, her shadowy blue eyes were partly hidden beneath the white lids, and over her parted lips the breath was coming each moment fainter, like the heaving tide falling ever lower and lower on the shore it is deserting. Lingard rushed to the bedside, and, sinking on his knees, exclaimed:

"Rosie, forgive me—forgive!"

Slowly she turned her dim eyes with a last look of life toward him, and, with great difficulty, lifting one thin white hand, she let it fall on his head as if in token of pardon and blessing. It rested there for a few more awful moments, during which her dying breath still sighed into the silence; then suddenly a light broke over her face like morning on the distant hills; with one low sob the spirit passed away from the worn and weary frame, and Annie Brook was beyond the reach of mortal ill.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CHARITY SUFFERETH LONG, AND IS KIND.

YES! Annie Brook was beyond the reach of mortal ill, but not so Ernestine Courtenay. The scorn of the world could never more bring the flush of shame to that cold white cheek, nor could its cruel hate or deadly love rend the poor heart that lay so still beneath the hand of death; but life, with its terrible capacity for suffering, was strong in the sensitive, palpitating frame of her who now beside that quiet corpse was entering on a silent agony which could only terminate with actual existence on the earth.

Thorold came hurriedly into the room, almost immediately after Annie breathed her last, and Lingard, hearing his step, rose up at once from his kneeling posture by the bed, and walked quickly to the door; but there he paused for a moment, and, turning round, he looked on Ernestine. Their gaze met, and though not a word was spoken, both knew that it was an eternal farewell which was passing between them; yet he saw there was not one shade of reproach in the sweet eyes that were looking their last on all that made life dear,—only mournful regret and anguish, which he rightly judged was far more for his sin than her own sorrow. He could not bear the sight; a spasm of pain contracted his features; and hastily turning from the room,

he rushed down stairs, and Ernestine knew she would never look upon his face again. Thorold was astonished at his abrupt departure, for he had heard from Mrs. Berry that Mr. Lingard, finding Miss Courtenay was detained to so late an hour, had come to escort her home; but when he turned and caught a glimpse of the dumb agony on Ernestine's face as she flung herself down by the dead body, with her hands clasped above her head, he understood it all. Very gently he asked her a few questions as to Annie's last moments, and she lifted up her head and answered him in a strange half-stifled voice; then he bid her take comfort in the thought that she had been able to carry out her mission to the last; and that she might hope the poor lost wanderer, now lying before them with so quiet a smile on her pale face, was even then at peace at her pitying Saviour's feet.

A faint light stole into Ernestine's mournful eyes, as he thus said the only words which could have given her comfort at that moment, and she looked up gratefully to him, but did not speak. Then he asked her if she wished any one to assist her in performing the last offices for Annie. She softly answered, "No." He saw that indeed it was best for her at that moment to be alone with the dead, so he quietly withdrew, giving Mrs. Berry many directions for her comfort, when she should have finished the last act of charity to her whom she had so long sought, and found at last, at the cost of all her own happiness on earth.

The glad sunshine of the early summer morning was pouring into the room when Ernestine began to compose the limbs of the dead, and spread over them the fair white linen, type of the wedding-garment, which she

trusted even this poor erring child might win from the tender mercy of the sinless Lord ; and, as she saw that a new day had begun, a strange feeling took possession of her, as if she herself had died with Annie—died forever to the sweet life of the past, with its love and hope and joy, and as if the whole earth would henceforth be for her cold and dark as the grave, whither that dead form must descend. She seemed to be acting out in a mournful drama her own future existence, as she performed her last duties to the corpse. When she closed the eyes she felt that her own also could look no more on all that had been beauty and brightness to her in this world ; and as she crossed the hands, in token of meek submission, on the lifeless breast, so she felt must she, in calm resignation, accept the death of hope and gladness in her heart, and only wait with Annie for the blessed resurrection, when the sorrows of earth would vanish like fleeting vapors in the light of the eternal day.

Very quietly she went through her task ; only at times the bitter pain at her heart found vent in a choking sob. With a lingering tenderness she combed out Annie's fair hair till it fell like a golden shroud over the lifeless form ; then she took a lovely white camelia from her dress, which Lingard had given her the night before, when, radiant with happiness, she had hurried to meet him, and laid it upon Annie's breast. She knew she had done with the flowers of life forever. When all was finished, she kissed the marble brow, and, kneeling down, lifted up her whole soul in one earnest supplication, that she might be able to turn the love she still must feel for Lingard, while life lasted, into one long unwearied prayer for him, that when he too should be

a silent corpse upon the bed of death, his soul might win forgiveness from his God, as she trusted this his victim had; then she bowed her head on her hands, and said in a low, calm voice, "Now, Lord, I am thine alone!" and so remained motionless, as if her spirit too had passed away to the land of perfect rest.

She found Mrs. Berry waiting anxiously for her appearance, when at last she left the death-chamber. Thorold had desired that Miss Courtenay should not be disturbed, and the nurse had not ventured to disobey; but now, as she came forward to meet the lady, she started back, as much appalled as if, to use her own words, she had seen a ghost. And truly Ernestine might almost have passed for one, with her white dress shining in the morning light, her face perfectly colorless, and a shadowy look in her eyes, as if they saw nothing near, but were gazing into some far-distant realm, unseen by others. When Mrs. Berry spoke to her, there was a peculiar quietude in her manner, which never again left her; it was as though nothing which could now befall her would have power to wound her any more, and she were merely passing through the world, with her hopes and heart elsewhere.

"My dear, dear lady, you do look so ill! what ever can I do for you?" said Mrs. Berry. "The carriage is waiting for you; but I am sure you are not fit to go home."

"I am quite well, dear nurse. Don't distress yourself about me. But I must go; I have nothing more to do here now."

"But you have had no rest, my dear lady, and not a morsel of food."

"It will not hurt me." What indeed could hurt her

now? "I do not want anything, dear nurse. Mr. Thorold will help you with all arrangements for the funeral. I shall be present at it myself."

"Indeed, ma'am, you are not able for it; you don't know how ill you look."

"It will not hurt me," she still repeated; and quietly, though with a feeble step, she went into the carriage, and drove through the streets as if all were unreal around her, and the people whom she saw but moving shadows in a dream.

That same day, as Ernestine expected, a packet was brought to her from Hugh Lingard. It contained her letters, and a few little things she had given him, all arranged with a degree of tender care, which touched her very much, and there was a note which contained only these words:

"I know that I must never look upon your face again. I know that my presence would henceforth be utterly insupportable to you; nor could I now myself endure to link my guilty life with yours, so innocent and holy. Ernestine, you will believe me that I never for one moment guessed the truth, or dreamt of the horrible vengeance that was pursuing me, while you, in your guileless charity, were tracking out the unhappy girl who, best in all the world, could teach you what I was. You always spoke of Annie Brook, and I knew only Rosie Brown. But I did know, from the first moment that your intense desire to save her revealed to me the depths of your pure soul, that I was totally unfit to be your life's companion; that you would have shrunk from me with horror had you known my previous history; and that I was in truth cruelly deceiving you

in suffering you to bind yourself to such a one as I am. The honorable course would have been to have given you up, even if I could not have brought myself to tell you the hateful cause of so dreadful a necessity; but, Ernestine, my one, my only love, you were dearer to me than words can ever tell; the very light of my life. I could not part with you; rather every word you said, which showed how mistaken you were in your opinion of me, made me long to hasten the time when no such discovery as this could have torn you from me, though it might have broken your heart. But your God has taken care of you. My own deeds have risen up between us, and thrust us asunder forever. I acknowledge the retribution to be just. My only love, farewell!

HUGH LINGARD."

A postscript merely stated that by the time Ernestine received this letter he would have left England. And so terminated her life's bright dream, in a darkness which had no ray of light, save in the hope that by the wreck of her own mortal happiness she had secured eternal peace for Annie Brook.

For the next few days Ernestine moved about at her usual occupations, calm and still, speaking very little, and seeming to hear and see nothing of what was passing round her. She told Lady Beaufort, quietly, that the engagement between herself and Hugh Lingard was broken off by mutual consent, and bore without a word the storm of indignant and astonished remarks with which the various members of the family met her announcement; still less did she heed the varying reports as to the cause of the rupture which were circulated in society. In her late experience she had gone

far above and beyond all that the world could do, either for or against her. But her physical strength was not proof against the shock she had undergone, and the long mental strain which had preceded it. She came home from Annie Brook's funeral chilled and shivering, though it was a warm summer day. In the night, fever came on, and for some weeks she was too ill to be conscious of anything that had befallen her, or was yet to come.

In the long hours of convalescence, however, all the past came back upon her, with the deep lessons it had to teach as to the true use and meaning of the life which, for so brief a time, is intrusted to each one of us, to make it, in its fruits, an eternal blessing or a curse.

Slowly she turned her wearied eyes to the future that might yet stretch out before her many years, and forced herself to consider how she meant to spend it. It was now about the time when her marriage would have been over, and Lady Beaufort had always intended after that event to take her two daughters to spend the winter in Rome; and she still adhered to her plan, though she would have been quite willing to let her niece accompany her. This, however, was what Ernestine felt she could not do. She knew that if she went with her aunt and cousins she would have to enter on a round of gayeties for which the events of the last few months had totally unfitted her; and, besides, she felt she had arrived at a turning-point in her life, which had changed the aspect of the whole world, and her own position in it altogether. The natural happiness to which a woman looks in the ties of wife and mother could never now be hers. Hugh Lingard had alone

possessed her love, and she knew that she could love none other while existence lasted. The life of mere society and amusement had always failed to satisfy her, and now the very thought of it was utter weariness to her; for her recent experiences had opened up to her a glimpse of the vast universe of sin and sorrow round her, and she longed with all her heart to make her life of some use to those who so sorely needed help, feeling that it would be only too short for all she should like to do for others in her course through the world. She thought of what she had seen in the jail and the workhouse, and of the terrible necessities of that unhappy class to whom Lois and Annie had belonged; and it seemed to her as if her difficulty lay only in a choice among so many, who needed all that she or any one could do for them. She had a sufficient income to live independently in any way she pleased; but, while she was revolving many different plans in her mind, she found the whole matter suddenly taken out of her hands, and a claim of so urgent a nature made upon her, that she could have no hesitation in giving up all else to it.

Tidings arrived from India of a terrible accident which had befallen Colonel Courtenay and his wife.

The very day after their arrival at Calcutta, he had been driving her out in an open phaeton, with a pair of fiery horses, little used to harness. Something had frightened them at the top of a steep ascent. They had run off at a tremendous pace, and had dashed the carriage against a stone wall at the bottom. It had been smashed to pieces, and both Colonel and Mrs. Courtenay were thrown out to a considerable distance. When persons came to their assistance, it was found that the

young and beautiful Mrs. Courtenay was quite dead ; she had fallen with great violence on a heap of stones, in such a manner as to cause instant death, while her husband had received a blow on the head which rendered him completely insensible. He had after a time regained consciousness ; but there had been some fatal injury to the brain, and though his life was in no danger, he had subsided into a state of hopeless imbecility. Of course, all that his friends in India could do for him was to send him home at once to England, under the care of a doctor ; and at the time when the letter reached Ernestine, her brother might be expected to arrive any day.

She was almost overwhelmed at the tidings. The thought of her proud, handsome brother, stricken down in the very prime of life and strength, and changed into a helpless idiot, was very terrible ; but more dreadful far was the recognition of the awful judgment of God, which had taken from him the power to repent of the evil deeds which had made him a murderer, while life was still spared to drag on perhaps for many hopeless years. And Julia, the gay, brilliant girl, for whose sake he had driven Lois to her death—a few short weeks only had he been allowed to look on her with pride and pleasure as his wife, and then she was suddenly withdrawn into the Unseen, while the world was still all in all to her. Ernestine bowed her head before the justice of God, as she remembered the words, —“When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.”

Her own course was plain. Woman-like, her deep love for her brother had never faltered, even when she knew him to be least worthy of it ; and now her whole

heart yearned toward him in his hopeless imbecility. She was his nearest living relation, and none cared to dispute her claim to take the sole care of him; and so it came to pass that Ernestine Courtenay once more took her way to Seamouth, feeling as if a lifetime of bitter experience had passed over her head since last she looked upon its quiet waters.

She was only just in time to go on board the steamer to meet her brother, before the passengers disembarked, and, sad as her anticipations had been, she almost reeled beneath the shock of his first appearance, as he was led up to her by the doctor and a servant: a broken-down, prematurely old man, with the tremor of a sort of palsy in all his limbs, and a face from which every spark of intelligence had fled; the eyes weak and glazed; the under lip drooping, and the helpless, useless hands hanging down on either side, as his attendants held him up by the arms. When Ernestine had recovered herself sufficiently to call him by his name, and try to attract his attention, he stared vacantly at her, without the smallest recognition in his eyes, and began in a querulous feeble voice to ask for his dinner; he wanted his dinner—why could he not have it?

“He has just dined,” said the doctor; but ceaselessly he continued to mumble out the same request while they conveyed him on shore, and the last word Ernestine heard, when she had seen him laid comfortably in bed, was the repetition of the same demand.

They had put him to bed early, as eating and sleeping were his sole occupations, and Ernestine, being thus left at liberty, went out in the twilight to visit the grave of Lois Brook. All was unchanged since she stood there last, save that a few pale autumn flowers had

sprung up over the last resting-place of the suicide. But what centuries of mental life for her and for others had passed away since then! The doom of eternity itself had been fixed for most of those who were dear to her. With a deep sigh she looked at the inscription she had placed on the headstone to mark the grave,

L. B.

Veniam supplicat,

in the hope that her unhappy brother might one day himself awake to penitence, and come to that spot to seek forgiveness over the ashes of his victim. And now, was he not already as much beyond the power of repentance as if he too lay cold and still beneath the turf with Lois? He was dead now, even as she was, to moral responsibility and consciousness; and not till the last day of awful revelation could he know the dread results of his sin in the fate of Lois Brook. And this was the brother who had been her pride and joy so long; to whom she had been wont to look up with such love and admiration! Then she thought of Reginald, no less dear, her dead mother's darling, the refined, intellectual, enthusiastic boy, who used to confide to her his dreams of exalted goodness and noble service in the cause of Christ. Gone was his brief life as the memory of a dream; and over his grave too there hung a gloom which never would have rested on it but for one man's presumptuous tampering with that faith, in others, which he had lost for himself. Reginald too was the victim of a fellow-creature.

With the remembrance of Annie came the never-dying anguish of the thought, that the hand which had

driven her to her dishonored grave, was the one on which she herself had hoped to lean, throughout the life that now must pass away uncheered by human love or joy. And Lingard,—how did her heart die within her as she thought of him, and of her own false faith in the goodness and holiness which he had never possessed !

Her head drooped lower and lower as these dark images rose one by one before her ; and her soul quailed beneath the mournful mystery of that unnatural cruelty, which makes human beings prey one upon another like wild beasts thirsting for each other's blood. The same life given to each, so brief, so momentous, so full of peril and temptation and suffering ; the same eternity, with the awful uncertainty of its blessedness or woe ; the same death, hastening with swift feet down the path which each must tread ; and yet the horrible spectacle is hourly seen of men driving one another down to hell, —corrupting, torturing each other ! Who would not sink beneath the weight of such dark truths, were it not for the One Vision on which the saddest, most bewildered eyes, may yet ever rest in peace,—the Cross of Calvary, where hangs the Light of the world, shining through all the gloom and tempests of the ages as they pass, and where all who have been wounded by sin or treachery may find their healing, if they will !

On Ernestine's soul that vision rose like the sun on the blackness of night, and to the inexhaustible love that there burns on forever and ever, she felt she could leave the living and the dead alike.

In the course of a fortnight, Ernestine was established with her brother George in a country-house she had

taken for him, and her long attendance began on the clouded existence which was to outlive her own. She soon found, however, that the care she bestowed on him, though absolutely essential to prevent his being neglected or ill used by his attendants, could not fill up either her time or her thoughts; and she was very thankful to be enabled now to carry out a plan which had been in her mind ever since Annie Brook had escaped from the Penitentiary. Her interest in that miserable class of outcasts had been far too strongly excited ever to die away, and she had greatly longed to try the experiment of providing a refuge for them on a different system from that which prevailed in most Homes, and which might at least serve as a preparatory shelter for them, until they were sufficiently advanced in real repentance to be able to accept the corrective discipline already in use. She gave up the whole of her fortune, except the small sum necessary for her personal expenses, to this object, and had soon prepared a suitable house near her brother's, which she took care should be surrounded with large gardens and grounds, so as to afford the means for ample out-door exercise and amusement. A kind-hearted, gentle lady, who had been left a childless widow, without the means of living, was, by Thorold's advice, placed in charge of it, with Mrs. Berry to assist her, and one or two other simple, kindly women, who had no theories as to rigid discipline or rule, but willingly agreed to take, for their one principle of action, the endeavor, by love and gentleness, to lead the wanderers they sheltered to a perception of that everlasting love of which they knew absolutely nothing.

Ernestine had learnt from Thorold to believe that the

chief mistake made in most other Refuges, was the treatment of these lawless, impulsive beings as if they were already in reality penitents, which it is not too much to say they never are. Many motives may lead them to seek a shelter, which have no foundation in sorrow for sin, or even in resignation of it; and when, therefore, they are placed under a system of conventual strictness and high moral pressure, which could only be advisable for persons deeply remorseful for a shameless life, it is inevitable that in many cases the result should be a failure, which leaves them to fall back into their guilt.

To grant these poor outcasts a simple shelter from evil, unencumbered by needless rules and constraints, and to strive to show them the goodness of their Father in heaven reflected in the love and compassion of His creatures, was Ernestine's first object; and when their health and spirits had improved under a few months' care and kindness, she tried gently to influence for good each individual separately, dealing with every one according to her special temperament, instead of placing the whole number *en masse* under a machinery of discipline, enforced by punishments, as is too often done elsewhere. She received all who came or were sent to her, without requiring certificates of health, or otherwise raising obstacles to their admission; indeed, it seemed to her that to take them when they were ill, and nurse them through their sickness, was one of the best means of gaining an influence over them. If an application was made when the house was full, she found a home for them elsewhere till she could take them in; but she would rather have sacrificed anything than let

one be refused a refuge who could be induced to seek for it. She provided work for them ; but when their shattered nerves or hysterical tendencies made a monotonous employment impossible or irksome, they were free to roam, without constraint, through the grounds ; and a considerable part of their ordinary occupation was the care of the garden, which afforded them both fresh air and amusement. Often they were taken a walk over the breezy common at the back of the house, which was too far from any town to render this liberty dangerous as an inducement to escape ; but Ernestine would have thought it a less evil to lose one or two in this way, than to subject the whole of them to the feeling of confinement and imprisonment, which they are so unable to bear. With Thorold's help she was able to make arrangements for the emigration of some of them every year to a distant colony, where situations were found for them, and where, in many cases, they married respectably. Not a few of them found their last home under her care, and met the early death, which so often overtakes them, with her arms round them, and her prayers ascending for them. She was able to spend a great part of every day at the Home, where her appearance always made a general festival ; and though she had many disappointments and sorrows, as the inevitable result of thus charging herself with the care of beings so wayward and so demoralized, yet did the work often bring to her, in the course of her patient life, the sweetest, purest joy that ever can be known on earth,—the hope that she had saved a deathless soul, and brought back to the feet of her dear Lord the wandering and the lost, for whom He died.

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Lois and Annie Brook lie cold and silent in the grave. That which man has made them they must remain, till the voice of the archangel calls them to meet their destroyers before the throne of God. But there are thousands like unto them in this land of ours,—a multitude such as no man can number, in whom the breath of life yet lingers, for whom the immutable fiat has not yet been spoken; and there are others scattered thick on the earth as flowers in the spring, children young and pure, sent into this world to be made fit for the Paradise of saints, who we know shall all too swiftly be made like unto the lost in their dishonored graves, if justice and mercy continue to veil their faces in sight of this deadly plague as now they do.

Shall it be ever thus? Shall this dread evil slay its thousands and ten thousands yearly, unheeded by those to whom legislative power is given, or by the no less influential rulers of public opinion, while still it ever cries to God for the vengeance that shall surely come at last? Shall its hideous wickedness still be ignored, glossed over, or made light of, as regards the destroyers, while the destroyed are branded with dishonor, and driven to deeper evil, by the blackest injustice that ever disgraced a Christian land? Is it to be always so, that in the realm which calls Christ master, the crime He denounced in awful terms is to be held by men, and *for men*, as scarce a sin? Are the haunts and centers of infamy always to be suffered to exist openly, and still allure souls to destruction in the face of day? Will a time never come when this matter shall be tried by God's estimate of right and wrong, and not by man's; when the measure of His justice shall alone regulate

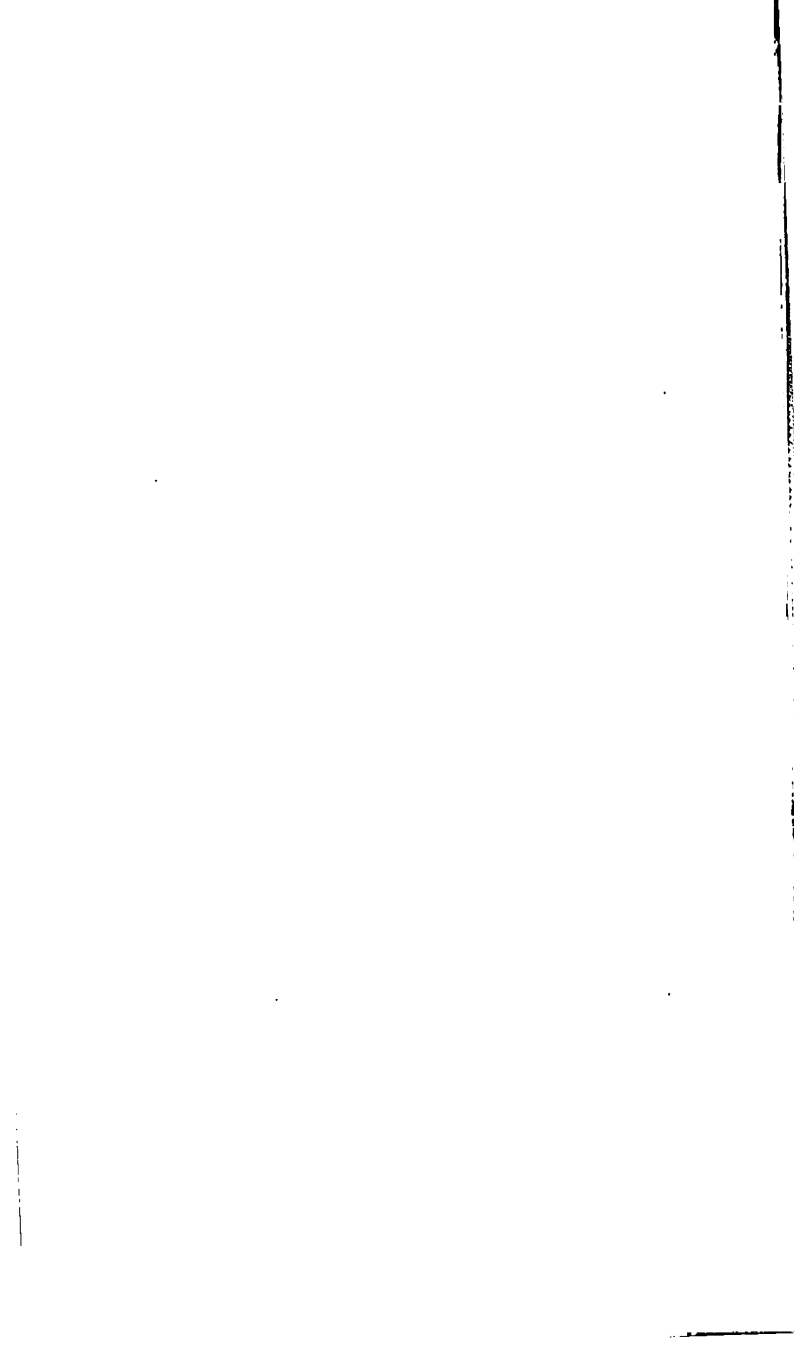
the balance of comparative guilt; when His standard of holiness shall fix the place it is to hold for all alike, in the world's code of moral and spiritual evil? Would that such a time might be foreseen even in hope alone! for till that day comes, this great Empire may advance in knowledge, in wisdom, in power, and in science, but it can never really become that which even now it claims to be,—THE KINGDOM OF GOD, AND OF HIS CHRIST.

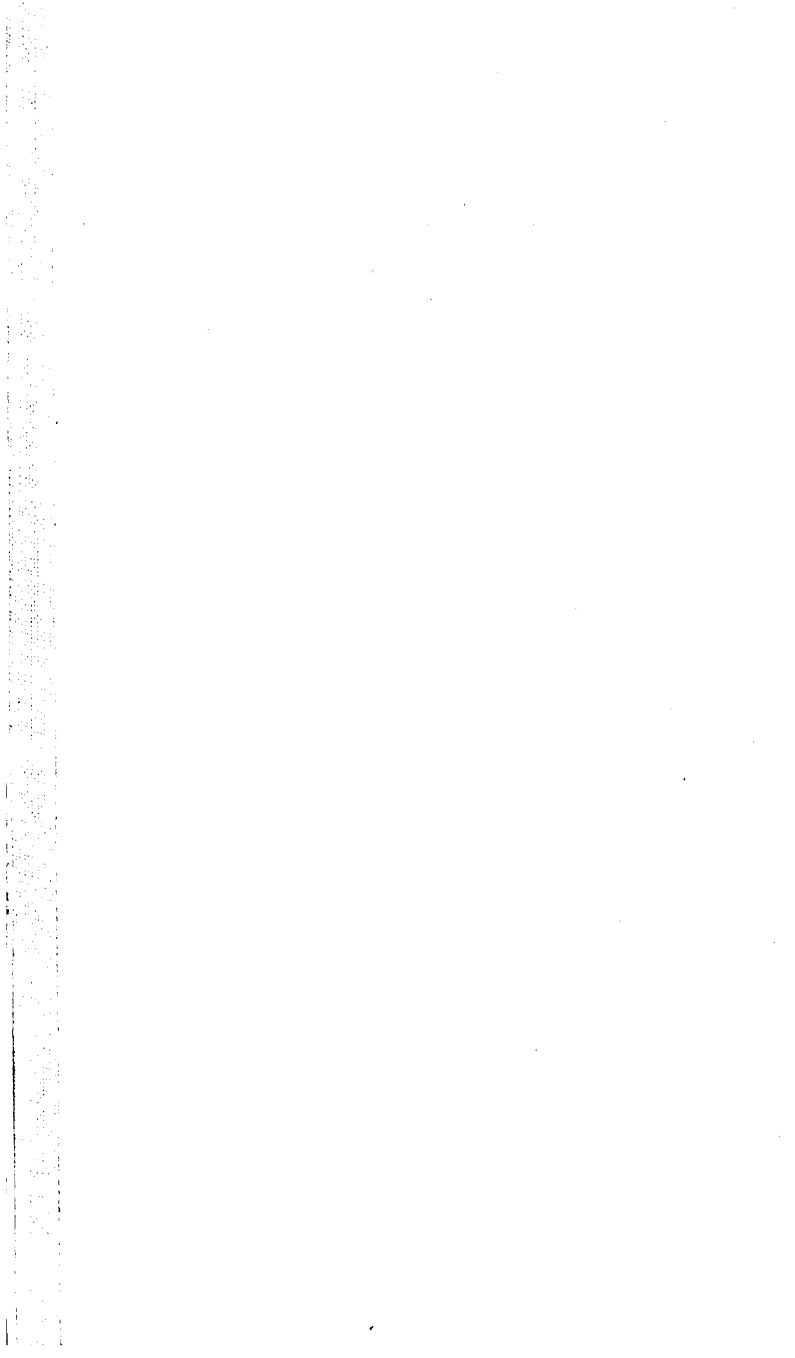
THE END.

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